

**ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE-
A CASE STUDY OF FEMALE
AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN
PALAKKAD DISTRICT OF KERALA**

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that, this written account entitled
**"ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE - A CASE STUDY OF FEMALE
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is a bonafide record of research work done by **Lilly. P.V**
under my guidance and supervision. The work has not been
previously submitted for any other degree or diploma.

Thrissur
1st September, 2000

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D E C L A R A T I O N

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supervision of **Dr. K.R Lakshmi Devi** and it has not been
previously formed the basis for the award of any degree,
diploma or other similar titles of recognition.

Thrissur
1st September, 2000

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Women in Agriculture and Economic Development

The world has witnessed the life and services of female agricultural labourers who have contributed much to the progress and well being of the societies, nations and the world at large in the social, economic, cultural and spiritual fields. Agriculture constitutes through human labour, a primary field of economic activity and an indispensable field of production. The world of agriculture, which provides society with the goods it needs for its daily sustenance, is of fundamental importance (Kapila, 1998; Rangarajan, 1998).

With economic growth, the structure of employment in the economy is expected to shift relatively away from agriculture and towards industry and services. The analytical study of various sources has not indicated any such shift until quite recently (Tiwari, 1997; Nirmala *et al.*, 1999). Agriculture is still the predominant activity in rural areas and women have remained very substantially in agriculture, indeed their dependence on agriculture has

increased and gender gap is growing (Vohra and Sen, 1986; Unni, 1992; Agarwal, 1998).

Women's participation in the labour market is determined by her family situation, education, growth in job opportunities and the general level of economic activity. (Dewan, 1995). Female work participation in agriculture depends on the intensity and relative growth of agriculture (Saikia, 1985). The incidence of women agricultural labour appears to be connected to factors underlying regional impoverishment. The Alternative Theory places greater emphasis on economic pressures that necessitate women's earning cash incomes through work outside the home. Generally, in poor families, women have to participate in wage labour regardless of child care and domestic work. It appears to be the women from poor regions who appear to predominate regionally as agricultural labourers. Both economic and socio-cultural factors determine female participation in rural agriculture sector. (Singh and Singh, 1991).

In developing economies, the majorities of the women are engaged in agriculture and related pursuits. Nearly 80 per cent of the economically active women in sub Saharan Africa and at least half in Asia except West Asia are

in agriculture (ILO, 1995). According to 1991 census, 81.3 per cent of rural women including scheduled castes in India have been reported to be engaged in agriculture. In urban areas, their proportion is 21.3 per cent. The Indian censuses categorise those engaged in agriculture into two broad divisions-cultivators and agricultural labourers. In general, the labour class especially women occupies a lower and vulnerable status in agrarian hierarchy than cultivators. The increasing employment of women as agricultural labourers and their displacement from the category of cultivators means a gradual decline in their status from self-producer to wage earner (Jain *et al.*, 1997).

There has been an increase in the participation rate of female labour in agriculture. Rural women play an important role in all stages of crop production from land preparation through harvesting and post-harvesting process. Women in many agricultural countries, form an organic component of the work force. They work along with the male members in agricultural activities on farms. As a labourer, their activities can be broadly divided into two categories: Income producing and Income supplementing (Rao and Gulati, 1998).

The major part of the Indian economy including agriculture and its workers continues to be in unorganized sector (Jose, 1989; Gill, 1999). The picture of labour contribution by sex in production of rice reports that women perform two-thirds to virtually of all the labour in a wide variety of agricultural activities (United Nations, 1985). The amount of women's agricultural work was determined more by type of crop. Most of the households derive income from rice cultivation by selling their labour of the members of farms larger than their own. Women are hired as wage agricultural labourers. By employing in agriculture sector as agricultural labourers, women provide livelihood and better opportunities to the members of many poor households and enhance their status in the society.

Rural participation rate of potential workers is an important determinant of total workers in agriculture. Women constitute nearly half of the total population of our country. Women since time immemorial have formed an organic segment of the working force and played a considerably equal role in agriculture. They along with male workers have not only been attending to the various field operations like transplanting, weeding, but their contribution is in no way lesser in many harvesting and post-harvesting operations like harvesting, threshing,

winnowing and storage. They have provided much of the unpaid family labour in agriculture. In developing economies, the growth of population is always reflected in the agricultural workforce, as agriculture does not require any special skill or training (Birla institute of Scientific Research, 1980). With in agriculture labour force, the proportion of women is more compared to men and their contribution in agriculture and farm activities is also greater (Arunkumar *et al.*, 1994).

Agriculture is the most essential and integral part of the life of female labourers. Agriculture can affect every aspects of their life. Female agricultural labourers have an even more direct and intimate link with the productive process of agriculture. The status of females as labourers is very low, they contribute as much as 75 per cent to subsistence and in societies, where the status of women is high, they contribute at least 30 per cent to subsistence (Sandey, 1975). The study of the performance and contribution of female poor labourers in the field of agriculture has revealed their significance in an agrarian economy. Their role and contribution cannot be separated from the contribution of other labourers of an economy.

The importance of women's contribution to the achievement of national economic and social goals was initially pronounced at the United Nations International Women's year conference in Mexico City in 1975 (Ruth Dixon and Anker, 1988). The new industrial organization made women an integral part of new economic order and an important part of its manpower resources (Lalitha Devi, 1982). The economic role of women cannot be isolated from development. The governments of developing countries have realized the need for equal participation of women and men in every sphere of national life for the better standard of living (Harish, 1991).

Women hold a significant position of distinct characteristics in the family and society. No society can develop fully without a significant contribution of women towards its development. To contribute to economic development, women must engage themselves in what is called 'economic' or 'gainful' activity. For a full integration of women in economic development, women must enter the labour force on equal footing with men.

The basic purpose of employment is enhancement of income. Employment brings in positive income, contributes to an increase in household income. It

is also observed that employment of women has often greater impact on reducing poverty and misery. Women tend to utilise their earnings more on basic needs of the households and particularly on improving the well being of the children. As a worker, women have greater concern and awareness about the future of the family and members (Papola and Sharma, 1997). The sector-wise activity also plays an important role in determining women workers' contribution to socio-economic improvement of household and its members (United Nations, 1995). Women contribute to development not only through remunerated work, but also through a great deal of unremunerated work (United Nations, 1995; Becker, 1997).

The development process of an economy has not only by passed rural women, but their traditional roles and status in the society has been altered adversely by the nature of development process itself. The role of women labourers in agriculture is presented in a hopeful manner to present and analyse the level of economic development. The different potential benefits accruing to women from their involvement in agriculture are income, control of valuable agricultural labour and decision making. It is generally an accepted fact that the participation in economic activities and economic contribution is a crucial factor to improve

their standard of living. This is further underscored by the fact that her earnings increase the aggregate income level of poor households and women spend much larger share of their earnings to basic family maintenance. The economic contribution of women labourers to their households and thereby to society is never ending (Gopalan, 1995).

Women labourers are an integral part of economic and social life and an ingredient for economic development. It is increasingly recognized that a more rational use of the potential of agricultural women could accelerate the pace of economic and social progress and thereby contribute to the overall welfare of human kind (Paul II, 1981). Women play a particularly important role in the agriculture sector of developing nations (ILO, 1985).

Women labour may be interpreted as a resource to be recognized and appreciated and which has to be treated as human resource and not like other material resources. It is assumed that women are a great asset. They can contribute a great deal to the achievement of national goals. It is also realized that participation of agricultural women is necessary to enhance the resource, the more the nation invests in its women the greater the return.

Female agricultural labourers as partners in economic development is a well recognized fact today. Although the female workers in the agriculture sector receive so little from the economy, they perform dual productive economic role as an unpaid labour at home and in the fields and paid labourers outside home. Unfortunately, the major contribution of these labourers has not been recognised and not fully taken into account and quantified. The role of women and particularly poor women labourers is yet to be fully appreciated. The sectoral occupational distribution of women workers in rural areas is typical of the livelihood pattern of underdeveloped traditional and primarily subsistence agricultural economy. By giving right type of opportunities, orientation and encouragement, women members can play a more meaningful role in agriculture and society and contribute to the rural and economic development.

There are numerous studies conducted on national, state and regional level that can be seen from the second chapter of this study and they are related to the different aspects of agricultural labourers. However, there has been no exhaustive work done to establish the role of women in agriculture especially in Kerala. The present study has taken various aspects relating to female labourers

with the hope that this would convincingly bring out the true picture of agriculture and its dependent female labourers. In order to analyse the role of women in agriculture as labourers, the present study is with special reference to the district of Palakkad in Kerala. The following are specific objectives.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the pattern of change in the employment of women in the agriculture sector.
2. To examine the role, position and wages of female agriculture labourers in different agricultural operations.
3. To analyse the socio-economic conditions of female agricultural labourers.
4. To find out the problems and difficulties confronted by the female labourers at work place and at home.

5. To examine the changing role of women agriculture labourers in the context of land reforms in the state.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Women play a key role in the agriculture sector, they are particularly indispensable in rice cultivation. Women have been the backbone of rural society who is shouldering multifarious responsibilities in household chores. The women agricultural labourers hire out their personal labour on the fields, sweating for lower wages to contribute towards household earnings. The female agricultural labourers despite contributing to the rural economy on par with men encounter innumerable difficulties in the existing socio-economic framework of the society.

Rural female labourers constitute one of the most vulnerable sections of our society. Though women's participation in the labour market is much lower than that of males, rural females have a much high work participation rate compared to urban families and the rural female work force has shown much faster increase. As far as

occupational diversification is concerned, the bulk of rural workers are still in the agriculture sector.

The status of women is intimately connected with their economic position, which depends upon the opportunities for participation in economic activities. Gender role denotes to the role of women as a sex category are being discriminated socially, economically and politically. The status of women is largely depends on the availability of employment for women. The casual nature of employment, absence of opportunities to improve the skills, segregation of work, unequal wages, exploitative conditions of work, commercialization and mechanization of agriculture are some of the problems that have oppressed the female agricultural labourers. The unorganized and illiterate character of labour force, seasonal and transient nature of agricultural operations is the cause for non-observance of statutory provisions. Concentration of vast number of women in this field also reduced the bargaining capacity of labourers. It also affected the wage pattern of these labourers.

The occupational structure of female work participation shows that most of them are still engaged in agriculture sector. This indicates that working women are

mainly employed in low-paid unorganized sector owing to their low literacy level and lack of skill. Hence, a rise in female work participation need not necessarily be reflective of their improved status. The level and occupational distribution of female work participation is a pointer to their continuing low socio-economic conditions in the society. This explains to the growing feminisation of poverty, particularly in the rural areas. The women who suffer from acute poverty join the work force for lessening the discrimination with in the household, but it actually makes them worse off by discriminating more. They are doubly disadvantaged with burden.

The depressed earnings of poor women workers in agriculture sector should be a matter of great concern. The quantitative contribution of these women workers to their family incomes not only significant but the qualitative contribution is also of immense value to their families. They spend a portion of their earnings on the upbringing and the betterment of the family members. Wage employment may be a women's only access to an independent source of cash income over which she can have control. Through women agricultural labourers contributed substantially to the family income, they exercised no control over their earnings.

The relative position of the female agricultural labourers to that of cultivators seems to have deteriorated. Agricultural labourers are the weakest among the weaker sections of our rural population and are most unfortunate ones. Among the poor, a high proportion of household income is generated by women's work. Poorly remunerated as it is, and female headed households are fairly common and increasing. Women continue to remain in the secondary position in the family though she makes economic contribution for the upliftment of her family. Due to cultural bondage and traditional norms and ideology, women are ascribed as secondary earners and male earners in the households are regarded as primary or potential earners.

The study on agricultural labourers belongs to the socially disadvantaged castes. The problem of rural agricultural labour is a problem of women. The scheduled caste women have lagged behind in educational attainment and consequently in the process of modern change. The relatively high participation rates of scheduled caste women as agricultural labourers were largely the outcome of economic compulsions. The basic objective in the case of this socially and economically backward section of rural society was for survival and sustenance. The factors like

less education combined with low earning and low employment occupations such as casual labourers in agriculture has provided a great chance of being poor and make the women socially and economically backward.

A rural woman, though in reality is an equal partner of man in agriculture, suffers from many handicaps, which stall her effective participation in the development process. The society itself is not conscious of the impact of the role she plays as a homemaker and as an agricultural producer. In view of these problems stated above, there is an imperative need to study and analyse in detail the condition of workers especially the women labourers in unorganized agriculture sector. This special consideration is a help to raise their status in their own communities but also to bring them socially at par with other women in all spheres of life. Thus this socio-economic study is necessary and meaningful to understand the emerging pattern of status and role of female agricultural labourers in rural areas as a person, as a family member and as a member of society. While considering the problems of female agricultural labourers and the phase of economic development and the nature of rural economy, the present study concentrated on agricultural sector and female

labourers who are engaged in agriculture in Palakkad district of Kerala.

According to 1991 census, in India, the proportion of female agricultural labourers to total female work force is 44.2. At the same time, in Kerala, this proportion is 36.1 per cent. In both cases, the female agricultural labourers are the largest segment in the total female work force participation.

In Palakkad, women play a vital role in agricultural production. The agriculture sector is the backbone of the economy of Palakkad district. About 70 per cent of the paddy growing areas in Kerala state came under the five districts of Palakkad, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Alappuzha and Malappuram. Among these major paddy growing districts, Palakkad alone accounts for nearly 25 per cent of total area under paddy in the state. 'Rice Bowl of Kerala' is the synonym for Palakkad district. Palakkad district is a part of agro-climatic area of Kerala state.

The present study is more concentrated on the female labourers who are engaged in agriculture especially in rice cultivation. Within primary sector, female workers predominate as agricultural labourers. About 70.17

per cent of female workers in Palakkad as agricultural labourers against 32.63 per cent of male workers. The increased share of rural women's employment in the primary sector is largely because of their increased participation in cultivation.

In terms of phase and nature of economic development, Palakkad has been among the most backward districts in Kerala. Palakkad continues to depend on agriculture to a much greater extent. In terms of occupational structure, this district has witnessed the importance and role of female agriculture labourers. A huge reservoir of labour is trapped in a slow growing, primarily agrarian economy with negligible possibilities in the non-agricultural sectors.

The survival of the poor people depends upon the level of employment opportunities. The employment is a means to raise the standard of living and to reduce the level of poverty of the working households. Most women in agriculture have actively participated in different parts of Palakkad district and secured as many development benefits as possible to the family members. As a consequence of exploitative nature of the male dominated society, women are not able to play their role. They are doubly

disadvantaged as poor as well as women. The contribution of female agricultural labourers are many, at the same time, the benefits received by them from the economy is less and make them backward in economically and socially. It is a fact that the development in economic position of these labourers should change the economic structure of the rural economy.

The fact is that the agriculture sector of Palakkad district is dominated by women labourers and their working conditions are still very poor. The absolute majority of work in agriculture have put millions of women in a disadvantage position and made them vulnerable. As a direct result of their predominance in agriculture sector, women's contribution to production and growth is not adequately accounted and recognized. The labour participation of women and other proportional contribution to total family income are the highest in households with the lowest economic status. The poorest families are the most dependent upon women's economic activity. Women play a vital role in socio-economic development of our country. Their contribution to agricultural development is quite significant even as they work under severe limitations.

1.4 Scope of the Study

Several studies conducted on female labour in agriculture have stopped short of a systematic attempt to look into socio-economic dimensions of the problem. The present exercise is confined to the economic and social conditions and problems relating to the female agriculture labourers in Palakkad district of Kerala. However, detailed study of the agricultural labourers with respect to their conditions and problems will be attempted with the help of primary data collected from three taluks of Palakkad district of the state. Thus it is hoped that it would help in working out measures for reducing the magnitude of the problem faced by female agricultural labourers.

Palakkad and Kuttanad are known as the 'rice bowl' of Kerala. In Palakkad, most of the activities are related to agriculture sector and above 50 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product is coming from primary sector. Palakkad district holds a unique position with 70.17 per cent of its female workers returned as agricultural labourers. All these contribute to the study of female agricultural labourers in Palakkad.

1.5 Plan of the Study

The present study consists of seven chapters. First chapter is the introductory chapter. Second chapter is divided into two sections. While a brief account of the review of earlier studies concerned with the analysis of the role and importance of agricultural labourers in economic development and the socio economic status of these labourers is given in the first section, second section of the chapter deals with the data source and methodology used in the present study. Chapter three traces the pattern of change in the employment of women in agriculture sector. The role and position of female agricultural labourers who engaged in agricultural operations and the rate and pattern of wage of these labourers are discussed in the fourth chapter. The profile of the sample villages from three taluks of Palakkad district of Kerala is presented in the first section of the fifth chapter. Findings of the fieldwork conducted in Palakkad district with a view to analyse the socio-economic conditions of these labourers are shown in the second part of the fifth chapter. The present day problems of the female agricultural labourers face at work and at home and the changing role of these labourers in the context of land reforms in the state is presented in the sixth chapter mainly on the basis of fieldwork. Finally, the

conclusions and recommendations of the present study is summarised in the seventh chapter.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The present study is restricted in its scope and the following are its limitations.

1. Though the study is intended to examine the socio-economic conditions of women workers engaged in agricultural sector of Palakkad district of Kerala, the present study is only confined to the portion of female agricultural labourers engaged in rice cultivation.
2. Though the research aims at studying the position of the female agricultural labourers in the present socio-economic situations, it bounds itself to the rural scene only. The female agricultural labourers working in and around the urban areas and semi urban areas are not covered in the present study.
3. All female labourers who are engaged in agriculture do not come under the purview of the present study and it is only confined to 300 female agricultural

labourers engaged in paddy cultivation in three taluks of Palakkad district.

4. Since the study is based on field survey made in some specific areas, over all generalisations cannot be drawn from it.

However, the present study with many of its limitations, modestly attempts to examine the role and the position of women agricultural labourers from all its dimensions.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

Lilly. P. V. "Role of women in agriculture- A case study of female agricultural labourers in palakkad district of Kerala " Thesis. Department of Economics, Dr. John Matthai Centre Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Review of Literature

In the developing economies of the world, women's role in economic activity especially in agriculture assumes an added dimension with the recognition that an enhancement of their work participation has implications for the achievement of overall development and socio-economic goals. There are numerous studies conducted in social sciences, which demonstrate clearly that the gender issues have distinctly strong spatial and regional dimension. There is a general awakening about the problems that are specific to women. In an agrarian economy like ours where social and economic hierarchy prevails, women are deprived of equal position. They are treated as inferior to men. The available literature deals with various aspects of women who are engaged in agriculture as labourers. Issues addressed include women labourers and their status - education, employment, wages, Income and standard of living, participation in social and political activities. This section is divided into different categories based on various aspects related to female agricultural labourers.

2.1.1 Women in Agriculture and Economic Development

Boserup (1970), Government of India (1975), Agarwal (1981), and IRRI (1985) highlighted the position and role played by female labourers. They studied about the economic contributions of these labourers. There is feminisation in agriculture and the share of female labourers are significant in developing countries and their economic resources is an addition to family income. Mazumdar (1975) showed the traditional classification of some jobs as the monopoly of women and also analysed the role of female agricultural labourers in economic development.

Das (1976) and Sethi (1982) noticed the role of women in agriculture. Sethi analyses the hours of work performed by the female labourers and also the conditions of labour. At the same time, Das stated that the income earned through work pushes the power and status of the females in a society. They convinced the fact that working women furnishes economic development and increases the status of women.

Acharya and Parker (1983) reported the rising importance and growth of female agricultural labourers.

This study also highlighted the infusion of mechanization and its effect upon the level of employment in agriculture particularly on female labourers. Mencher (1984) focuses on different roles of both sex and traced women as labourers in the traditional rice growing regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In another study (1985) she provided the wide range in female work participation and its implications in the development strategy.

Wanshi and Kapse (1985) tried to find out the contribution of female workers in the farm sector. The participation rate of females is high in Una district of Himachal Pradesh. Fruzzetti (1985) studied the role of rural women in a farming community. She also noticed the importance of female employment in agriculture, provides income and better standard of living to the workers.

In their studies, Marothia and Sharma (1985) and Desai and Patel (1985) emphasized the role of working women in agriculture. The first one investigated the contribution and participation rate of female labourers in agriculture in rice farming systems of Chattisgarh region. At the same time Kelkar (1985) examined the relationship between women's work in subsistence agriculture and rural development strategies. In Telangana, Volimiheni (1987)

examined Socio-economic status and the level of women's participation and identified the jobs available for women in agriculture. She also assessed the role of rural women in economic development.

Nair (1986) conducted a case study of a woman agricultural worker in Kuttanad, Kerala's rice bowl. Government of India (1987), Bhatt *et al.* (1987) and Paranjee (1987) studied and identified in depth the role of women in agriculture. Government of India (1989) and Deshpande (1989) calls for strategies to enhance women's contribution to agriculture through improved services and training.

Laxmi Devi (1988), Saradamoni (1989) and Singh *et al.* (1988) noticed the growth and importance of women in agriculture. They stated that most of the rural women become agricultural labourers and emphasised the role of women in agriculture. At the same time Satapathy (1989) conducted a study on the role of women in agriculture.

Pradhan (1990), Nambiar (1992) and Varma (1992) and Roy (1993) analysed the proportion and the importance of female agricultural labourers. They provides income to the family. The economic resources they get will

determine the socio-economic status of the labourers. They analysed the socio-economic condition of these labourers. Umadevi (1994) showed the participation rate of female labourers in agriculture and discussed about the wage condition and the economic role they played in development.

The Human Development Report (1995) identified the importance and role played by the female labourers in unorganised sector. It made a clear vision about the share of income and their economic contribution. The rural female labourers were engaged in unorganised sector especially in agriculture.

Jain (1996) argued that agricultural operations especially weeding and harvesting are the main wage earning occupation for women agricultural labourers in many parts of India. This study gives the awareness that the feminisation in agriculture is important and the rural female labourers are mostly engaged in agricultural and allied activities.

It is pointed out the significance of female labourers and feminisation in agriculture recommended by Chackacherry (1997) and Banerjee (1997). They analysed

the level of female labourers in agriculture and highlighted their role, which is important and brings development to the economy.

2.1.2 Women Participation in Agriculture

Chawdhari and Sharma (1961) made an attempt to analyse and reported about the nature of participation of female labour force in agriculture. The participation rate is an increased rate, but the employment opportunities provided to the females is in a decreased rate. Gulati (1975, 1984) and Nath (1970) observed the general decrease in female labour force participation over the period 1961-1981. The employment rate decreased and the nature of cropping pattern also helps to decrease the participation rate.

Ram (1969) attempted to analyse on the changing trends of women's employment in agriculture and non-agriculture sector. The employment opportunities for women especially in rural economy is in agriculture. He found out that most of the women labourers, due to lack of education and skill, depends mostly upon the agriculture sector. The census conducted by the Government of India (1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991) aimed at investigating the

participation rates of female labourers in agriculture and in other sectors at national, state and local levels.

Mukerji (1970) who has identified and interpreted the spatial pattern of the varying extents of female participation in rural agriculture labour in Andhra Pradesh. It reveals that there is a striking concentration of rural female agricultural labour in Andhra Pradesh and discussed the main factors, which are responsible for the concentration of these labourers in Andhra Pradesh. An evaluation, which was made by Government of India (1974) on the level of status of women. The level of employment opportunities shows the level of income and status of female workers. The unemployment rate is high among female workers than male workers especially in agriculture sector.

Reddy (1975) commenting on the paper of Gulati, explains rural female participation rates in terms of certain agricultural factors such as irrigated area, average annual rainfall, crops grown and agriculture labor productivity to bring out the inter regional variations in female participation rates in India. Lal (1976) finds the average and operation wise female labour employment, which clearly supports the prevailing view that in India the supply of

labour is wage responsive. The real wage in agriculture sector is widely depends on the growth and productivity of agriculture.

Bardhan (1977, 1989) and Banerjee (1989) made the contention in their study that the nature and dimension of female labour force participation in the country pointed to the fact that a very large proportion of the workers turned as agricultural labourers. The proportion of female labourers in agriculture is increasing, which indicates their poverty and low standard of living. Agriculture provides employment to the rural females. The level of unemployment shows the level of living, poverty and indebtedness. Dixon (1978) finds the tension between the low economic status which requires women to engage in economically productive activities outside the home. This study also stated that the economic condition will push the females to work and earn livelihood to their family.

Chopra (1979) found out the variations in the incidence of cultivators, agricultural labourers and female workers in three agro-climate zones over three census years. In 1951, 1961 and 1971, she made an attempt to find out the interregional variations in rural India. The increase in the proportion of cultivators is less than that of agricultural

labourers. The female agriculture labourers' growth is significant in 1951 and 1961. Mitra *et al.* (1980) observed the shifts in occupational participation from 1961 to 1971. This study also analysed the status of females in the rural society.

Another work which was provided by Gadre and Mahalle (1985) shows that, between 1956-57 and 1980-81, the number of male farm family workers per hectares decreased by 22 per cent but females increased by 20 per cent. The main reason for this was due to the shift away from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations among men. In 1981, International Labour organization (1981) focused their study with ARTEP on women participation and labour force in India. In rural areas, the participation rate showed an increasing trend especially in unorganised sector like agriculture. Deere and Leal (1982) observed the importance of female agricultural labourers. There is an increasing trend in the participation of females in agriculture. The participation of females in agriculture is sensitive to the range of activities included as a part of agricultural production.

In her study, Sen (1983) examined the importance of women in agriculture sector. Most of them

were worked as agricultural labourers. She also worked out the incidence of regional variations and the level of employment. She measures the incidence as the proportion of female agricultural labourers in the total rural female population. Dutta and Sharma (1985) analyses the organizational character of peasant households induces more female labour participation in agriculture. This study conducted in Ranchi district of Bihar and concluded that the contribution of female labourers in agriculture is significant. Krishnamurthy (1984) discussed the male as well as female agricultural labourers' participation rates on the basis of 1971 and 1981 census and National sample survey. In this study, the author raised two questions: Is there any evidence of a relative shift away from agriculture sector and any change in the participation rate?

Saikia (1985) identified the work participation of female labourers in Assam state. The participation of females in agriculture sector is due to economic compulsion and the level of poverty. This study aimed at finding out the important factors like the effect of cropping pattern, cropping intensity, economic conditions of labourers, which influenced the work participation of female agricultural labourers. Arunachalam (1985) observed that in hill regions of North India and Assam, the female workers outnumbered

male workers in agriculture. It also analysed the employment and participation rate of female labourers in agriculture.

Banerjee (1985) argues that there is a declining trend in participation of female labourers in agriculture. It is also aimed to investigate the reason, which affect the declining trend of participation and there is loss of employment in India and Indian states. In most of the Indian states show a declining trend of employment in agriculture.

Chattopadhyay (1986) discussed the participation rate of female labourers in agriculture, type of farming activities, wages and system of payment through data collected from agricultural casual labourers of 12 villages of Sriniketan, West Bengal during 1976-77. This study tried to find out the various explanations for the declining trend in the participation of females.

Duvvury (1987) examines the participation of women in work force, trend in female participation rate over time and international differences in female work participation rate through a survey of existing literature. This study analysed the work participation of women

agricultural labourers' during 1961 and 1981. Shrivastava (1988) analyses the trends during 1971-1981 in terms of rural-urban work force, in different sectors including primary and also in agriculture and industry.

Swarnikar (1988) observed women participation in rural economy and the role of female agricultural labourers in Madhya Pradesh. It also tried to analyse their growth and the conditions in the rural economy. Jose (1989) and Acharya and Panwalker (1989) analysed the fact that a very large proportion of the women workers belong to the category of unskilled workers who offer themselves for wage employment in low paying occupations such as agricultural labourers and domestic labour.

Sundaram (1989) also enlightened the role of women in agriculture. It also analysed the nature and character of these labourers on the basis of different census years. The important fact to note that there is a declining trend in female labour participation in agriculture during various years. Bhat (1989) Sapru (1989) and Nagaraj (1989) attempted to understand the participation rate of females in agriculture as labourers. Sapru analysed the conditions of female agricultural labourers of south Bengal. Chavannavar (1990) also analysed the participation rate of

females in agriculture. The role played by female labourers in agriculture is very important than their men folk.

Gulati (1991) observed that the overall decline in female work participation rates in Kerala is partially a statistical illusion that is a reflection of the failure of enumerating agencies. There has been little exhaustive work done to establish the nature and causes of declining trends in female work participation in Kerala. Tripathi (1991) is also analysed the participation rate of females in agriculture as labourers.

Visaria and Unni (1992) tried to find out the importance and the participation rate of agricultural labourers. Visaria and Unni analysed the status of self-employed women and their role in human resource development. Eapen (1994) stressed the changing structure of the work force in Kerala. This study is also analysed the growth of female agricultural labourers in different districts of Kerala.

Jayasree (1994) recorded the rate of workers (89.5 per cent) engaged in unorganised sector in 1981. Of course, 82.3 per cent are engaged in agriculture and allied occupations. Where as only 13.3 per cent of the female

workers are employed in organized sectors of the labour market. The female labourers who are engaged in agriculture, contributes income to their family. Devaki Devi (1994) analysed the participation of women in agriculture. This study noted the fact that the female agricultural labourers are more concentrated in developing countries including Asia.

Jha (1995), Das and Vijay Kumar (1995) and Banerjee (1995) observed the growth and the importance of women labour participation in agriculture. On the basis of their study, they clearly stated that the increasing role of female labourers' is necessary to provide economic resources and the livelihood to their family members. Dewan (1995) confirmed with the increasing level of female work participation in the economy. The female participation rate changes according to the following factors. The work participation rate increases as poverty increases and declines with increase in household income and male earnings. The female participation is on the basis of economic compulsion. Kabir and Krishnan (1996) studied the reasons for increasing agricultural labourers in Malabar region of Kerala.

Agarwal (1997) made an attempt to study the role of women in agriculture. The participation rate of women in agriculture is greater than male and also noticed the status of female workers. Unni (1997) studied the position of women workers in agriculture. This study is also analysed the wages of these labourers and found that female labourers who entered into work force especially in agriculture as labourers is due to their poverty and indebtedness. Nirmala and Bhat (1999) also studied and analysed the female work participation in the emerging labour market in India. This study also highlighted the fact that there is female concentration in the agricultural sector and there is an increasing trend in the participation rates of women labourers.

2.1.3 Women and Low Status

Government of India (1954) reported an intensive survey on the basis of employment, wages and living levels of the agricultural labourers. Gupta (1960) also analysed the growth of agricultural labourers' and reported that the wages which is given to the labourers and ultimately the level of indebtedness makes them always in vicious circle of poverty.

Mamoria (1969) aimed at to find out the main problems confronted by female as well as male agricultural labourers. This study also tried to find out the problems like low wages, unemployment, low income, poverty and indebtedness. Reserve Bank of India (1971-72) focused on rural indebtedness, its sources and purposes. This study stated that the rural indebtedness is the sign of low status of the labour households in the society.

In various years, government of India (1973, 1975, 1976, 1978 and 1983), Mongia (1976) conducted study on the different aspects of agricultural labourers. The first study concentrated on their indebtedness, income, consumption expenditure and employment. The second study analysed the labour force that are engaged in agriculture and their status in the society. The level of employment, wages and earnings and standard of living are also discussed in this study.

Bardhan and Rudra (1980) made the contention in their study that the wage rate varies with the sex of the labourer. Female labourers usually get a lower rate. Mencher and Saradmoni (1982) examined the main problems faced by the female labourers in agriculture. Female labourers further faced the health hazards posed by

long hours of work in muddy water with the risk of parasitic infection, especially in rice growing areas. These aspects of female labourers are also discussed by Saradamani (1983).

Hara Gopal, Nagashwar Rao and Swamy (1984), Jha (1984) and Sharma (1984) worked on the problems of poor rural labourers who engaged in agriculture. The main problems confronted by the agricultural labourers are low earnings, poverty and indebtedness. Hara Gopal *et al.* analysed the problems with special reference to agricultural labourers in Andhra Pradesh. Chatterjee (1984), Gupta and Sen (1984), Government of India (1988) and Raj (1988) aimed at to find out the difficulties faced by women labourers. The rural women workers have to bear double work load by performing household duties and economic activities. They find it difficult to cope with these double duties. The contribution made by these workers to their family is significant.

The World Labour Report (1984) also conducted a study on the features of agricultural rural poor and their income. The standard of living, employment and wages are in a lowest position. Agarwal (1985) in her study reveals the fact that the agricultural labourers who are the bulk of women workers in agricultural sector come from a

traditionally low social status. These women workers are mostly illiterate and have to face irregular employment, heavy burden and exploitation.

Jain (1985) discussed about female work participation rates, which vary directly with increase in poverty. Women's employment has a direct influence on economic prosperity. Government of Kerala (1985) and Joshi (1985) also emphasized the problems of female labourers and their family. Jain and Nayar (1985), Jhurani (1985) and Vedantam (1985) focused their attention on women, who are victimised in matters of paucity of land, low level of employment and other problems. The World Labour Report (1985) and Agarwal (1985) made an attempt on the problems of female labourers and these studies concluded the fact that the socio-economic conditions of female agricultural labourers were low and they are the most vulnerable section of the unorganised sector.

In their study, Bandopadhyay (1986) investigated the participation of female labourers in agriculture. But at the same time, they analysed the difficulties confronted by the female labourers and most of them were below the poverty line. The nexus of landlessness, growth and poverty has thus assumed significant importance. The same point

is also advocated and investigated by Kurian (1987) and Vaidyananthan (1986) and concluded that the level of living of these labourers were insecure and precarious.

Nair (1987) Rai (1987) a Kalaimatha (1988) attempted to analyse the position of women in agriculture. The ultimate conclusion of their study reveals that the overall statuses of female labourers are low. Nair and Narayanan (1988), Chen (1988) and Maurya (1988) highlighted on the socio-economic status of women and land less labourers in agriculture. Mahendra Dev (1988) made an attempt to analyse the incidence of poverty among rural labour households. He finds that agricultural labour households have the highest incidence of poverty as compared to other type of households in all states of India.

Bhatt (1989) find out the major problems faced by the rural female labourers. International Labour Organisation (1995) and Government of India (1995) conducted study on the role played by the female labourers in agriculture. At the same time, they focused their attention on the problems like unemployment, poverty and low income of these labourers.

The most important problem faced by female agricultural labourers in India is the vicious circle of poverty. This point has been stated and analysed by Kannan (1995), Gulati (1995), Krishnaji (1995) and Chatterjee and Kundu (1997). Kannan identified the fact that the wage rates of these labourers in Kerala are consistently higher than other Indian states except the agriculturally prosperous state of Punjab and Harayana. These studies also noticed the socio-economic backwardness and the poverty of the rural labourers.

Jhabvala (1997) identified the unorganised sector workers who constitute nearly 93 per cent of the workforce, who live and work in the most precarious conditions often they work at back breaking labour for a wage that does not even fetch them two square meals a day. Mazumdar (1997) and Manuja Devi (1997) studied the importance of female agricultural labourers especially in rural areas. The level of earning reflects the incidence of under employment or surplus labour in agriculture. The level of earning will affect their standard of living and ultimately socio-economic status of the poor rural workers.

Gulati (1981) noticed that some tasks are done exclusively by women and are often back breaking and low

paying. Gaiha (1981) analysed the risk of poverty and finds that there is a tendency of poverty, which is stronger in village households. In these households women entered into workforce as a labourer is essentially as a result of poverty and economic compulsion. Rajula Devi (1986) also stated that the proportion of women working as agricultural labourers has gone up with the decline in opportunities in traditional industries and services. Mathew (1985) examined broad theoretical aspects of employment, emerging trends in structure of women's employment in Kerala and gender based exploitation in a changing environmental and institutional framework. The bulk of female employment is in unorganised sectors and female agricultural labourers were still the prominent segment in the economy.

Patel (1988) argues that economic development has resulted in marginalisation of women from the work force causing large number of them to seek employment in the unorganised sectors. The economic compulsion and level of poverty compels them to enter even in low paid employment as agricultural labourers. Poonam S. Chauhan (1996) tried to analyse the trend of Indian labour force that is in unorganised sectors. The study also revealed the fact that most of the workers who engaged in unorganised

sectors are women. Kulkarni (1997) studied the position of female agricultural labourers on the basis of their role especially in rural sector, their employment and work. Most of the rural females were depended upon agricultural employment and work.

2.1.4 Employment and Unemployment

International Labour Organisation (1963) conducted a study primarily on women in paid employment in India. This also concentrated in their traditional avenues of employment and also provides the figures of female workers including in agriculture. At the same time, Mencher (1980) found that landowners preferred to employ women labourers than men workers. She estimated that in Palakkad, on an average, used women for 417 hours per acre of wetland per crop season.

Mamoria (1981) discussed about the level of employment in agriculture and presented percentage distribution of female agricultural labourers in India. This study also mentioned about the fixation of working hours in a day in agriculture. The changes in agricultural employment has been noticed by Ghosh and Mukhopadhyay (1984) and stated that the change in cropping pattern, the

participation rate and employment opportunities allotted to females is also changed. There is a declining trend in the level of female employment in agriculture.

Panghal and Rame (1985) and Sen (1985) noticed the worse conditions of female labourers in terms of employment opportunities. Panghal *et al.* mainly concentrated their study on women labour and their employment pattern with special reference to Haryana agriculture sector. At the same time, Jaiswal and Singh (1985) observed the condition of rural female labourers and reported that the status of these labourers were very low due to low wages and income and reduction in employment opportunities in agriculture.

Malik and Giri (1986) aimed at to find out the economic aspects of employment of female labourers in agriculture. In their study, Daugat and Yadav (1985) covers 180 land holdings from nine villages of Karjal Tehsil in Ahmad Nagar. Accordingly, it shows that the average per hectare, labour use for crop production was 23 days for a male and 12 days for a female. At the same time, Grewal (1985) pointed out that the level of employment is low for scheduled caste female agricultural labourers. This study

covers 120 scheduled caste workers from six villages in two blocks of Sangrur district during 1984 – 85.

Vaidyanathan (1986) conducted a study on the average of full days worked in agricultural operation and reported a decline in employment between 1964–65 and 1974–75 for all sections of the population. The employment will determine their status in the society. Dantwala *et al.* (1986) discussed the changes in employment and working conditions of rural poor women and reported that the cropping pattern will affect the level of employment in agriculture.

Mies (1987) made an attempt to examine the difference between income and expenditure for consumption caused mainly by the low wages and insufficient and irregular employment of women and men through out the year. This clearly pointed out the incidence of poverty among the agricultural labourers and their family. . . Bhalla (1988) and Singh *et al.* (1988) studied the employment pattern of women, on farm and household work. At the same time Nayyar (1989) surveyed the trends of employment in agriculture during 1971–81 in Punjab and Haryana. The study also reveals that there is a declining trend in female employment.

Fatima (1991) dealt with the plight of rural agricultural women labourers and stated that the condition of rural women is depends upon the level of employment opportunities available to them. Unni (1992) analysed the trends of employment among the female workers in agriculture during 1961 to 1988, on the basis of various secondary data sources. During these years, there is an increasing trend in casualisation especially among female labourers. This study also tried to assess the position of agricultural labourers and reported the changes occurred in the level of employment of women in agriculture.

Acharya (1993) Gopalan (1995) and Jha (1997) focused on women and employment in agriculture. The bulk of employment in agriculture to women is depends upon the extensive crop cultivation especially the rice cultivation. This also discussed the nature and level of employment available to them. They also made the aim of their study to reveal the importance of agriculture in order to provide employment to the poor females in rural India.

Gulati (1976) studied about unemployment problem among females in India, which shows that though there is a wide interstate difference in the level of unemployment, male and female levels Co-vary together.

The group of female labourers in agriculture is the worst among rural labourers who confronted the problems of poverty and high incidence of unemployment. Acharya and Mathrani (1991) stated that in most of the states in India the incidence of unemployment is higher among women workers compared to men workers. The days of employment available to women workers shows a declining trend and there is a change in sectoral employment, which automatically increases the problem of unemployment among the female agricultural labourers.

2.1.5 Impact of Technology on Employment and Income

Billings and Singh (1970) and Chakravarthy and Tiwari (1979) emphasized the fact that with the economic development of an agricultural area, the participation of farm work by women declines. The economic development entails the introduction of machinery. They analysed the economic effects of mechanisation on female labourers of Punjab and Haryana.

Mies (1980) has recorded the removal of women from their means of production and from their productive function by the introduction of new technology in West Godawari district. Sen (1982) reflected on the impact of

green revolution on female labourers. Based on Kerala study, Kala (1982) and Srivastava (1983) observed that it is almost a taboo for women to handle any of the modern labour saving devices. Jobs performed by women are mainly menial. Labour displacement character of even simple technologies affects the women most because of their lack of education and skill.

Agarwal (1985) reviews work efficiency of male and female labourers in agricultural tasks, relative wage rates, implications of agricultural modernization for rural women and schemes for improving their economic status. Joshi and Alshi (1985) analysed the impact of the introduction of high yielding variety and stated that it is one of the important factor, which has increased the agricultural production and created employment opportunities. However, Pant (1985) observed the effect of modernization in agriculture by transferring traditional farm operations to machines poses yet another threat to rural female workers.

Ramesh *et al.* (1985) and Ray *et al.* (1985) studied and evaluated the impact of technological changes in agriculture and its impact on the economic status of agricultural labourers. United Nations (1986) focused on the decline in employment and it has been associated with

the introduction of new technology in agriculture and in Asian regions, the decline in employment appears to have been concentrated on women.

Duvvury (1988) analysed the women's participation in labour force. It also focused on the impact of technical change on women in agriculture. Due to mechanization, there is a decline in employment. Punjabi and Sadhu (1988) and Punia (1988) examined the role of women in agriculture and analysed the role of national development approaches and their impact on women. Chen (1989) and Sinha (1993) observed the displacement of women from agriculture, where the high yielding variety package of inputs especially chemical fertilisers and weedicides and mechanization are adopted. The technological development in agriculture sector shows the removal of female unskilled labour, which brings progress with pauperisation.

2.1.6 Women Labour and Wage Discrimination

The government of India (1960), Bhalla (1974) and Parthasarathy and Rao (1975) tried to reveal the complexity of wage structure, which existed in agriculture sector and rightly pointed out that there is differences in

wages by sex and operation wise in different regions. Andippan (1980) observed the process of wage fixation in different states of India. The government appointed wage boards and other agencies responsible for fixing minimum wage scales for men and women.

Jose (1980) analysed and developed the fact that women comprised a significant proportion of the agricultural labour. He tried to find out the wages of agricultural labourers in different Indian states in real and money terms. Panikar and Soman (1984) analysed the wages and status of female labourers in Kerala. Rao (1985) also analysed the wages of female labourers and their involvement in activities. This study also realized the relation between the education and development.

Bergmann (1984) analysed the conditions of agricultural labourers in Kerala on the basis of sex. This study mainly with reference to Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. It also analysed the Agrarian Reform and its impact on workers. Subha Rao and Reddy (1987) focused on wage differentials between male and female farm workers in Andhra Pradesh. Jose (1988) categorized the agricultural operations such sowing, women workers predominantly perform transplanting, weeding and

harvesting with relatively lower wages. Indian states exhibit considerable gender disparity in wages and showed the changes in money wages of both sex during the period 1970-71 to 1984-85.

Unni (1988) conducted a study on real wages for female agricultural labour for the period 1956-57 to 1977-78 on the basis of Rural Labour Enquiry and National Sample Surveys. It is significant to note that only in Kerala and West Bengal, there was decline below the base level only for one year during 1970-71 to 1984-85. Nehru (1989) noted the women's participation in agriculture and found that their work is on family fields and therefore work is undervalued.

Subha Rao and Paniswara Raju (1990) Arputhamurthy (1990) and Government of Kerala (1994) highlighted on the existing wages of different sectors of the economy. The former study also analysed the fact that wage differentials based on operations are more prevalent is due to varying degrees of demand for employees. Government of Kerala renewed and published the new wage rates accordingly on the basis of the changing conditions of the economy. Kalpagam (1994) analysed the wages of female workers who were engaged in all sectors. The study found

out the fact that the female labourers are subjected to low wage rates. The wages of female agricultural labourers are lower than their male counter parts.

The government of Kerala (1995,1995, 1996) published the average daily wage rates of skilled and unskilled workers in agriculture sector. It also surveyed the socio-economic status of the workers who earn low wage and have less employment opportunities. Government of India (1996) tried to conduct a survey and published agricultural wages by operation and gender wise at national, state and district level. It analysed the existing wages of agricultural labourers and found that the female wages are lower than males. Another study conducted by the Government of India (1996) on money wages and minimum wages of agricultural sector. The existing money wages and minimum wages is vary from state to state and region to region.

Parthasarathy (1996) examined the trends of wages and employment of agricultural labourers on gender basis. This study found out the fact that there is an increase in wages of females, however, it is lower than their menfolk. The level of employment to female labourers is lower in agriculture. Another survey conducted by

government of India (1996-97) and reported that the wages of female labourers is low in all states of India. A study was carried out in the state of Harayana by Kaur and Goyal (1996) to analyse the extent to which female agricultural labourers lay behind the male labourers with regard to wage payment to different agricultural operations, average earnings and mode and rate of payment.

Tulpule (1997) conducted a study on the conditions of employment and the working of minimum wages act in India. Kannan (1998) stressed on the fact that the wages of males and females who are engaged in unorganised sectors including agriculture is very low. He also analysed the unemployment rates and the growth of money wages of male and female paddy field labourers. The study stressed the growth of money wages by gender in different years. The incidence of unemployment is more borne by the female labourers than males in Kerala.

Jhabvala (1998) concentrated her study on weaker sections especially on women and child agricultural labourers. This study is mainly stressed on the effects of minimum wages act on labourers, their standard of living and the socio-economic status of the female workers. Giri and Rao (1961) and Krishnaji (1971) examined the seasonal

variations in wage rates of agriculture sector. Kodiyan (1972) and Jose (1973) show the role of workers, their trends and the rates and differences in wages of agricultural labourers in Kerala. Their study mainly concentrated on the existing wage rates of the labourers and the role and influence of trade union to gain higher wages in Kerala.

Sathuraman (1972) looks at seasonal variations in terms of differences among operational wise wages in agriculture sector. There are variations in wages on gender as well as operational wise activities. Khana and Mathew (1979) and Patel (1982) showed the unequal wages to women, which is a part of the general discrimination against women in the work. These studies also pointed out of the fact that in unorganised sector, female workers are invariably paid much less than that of the males. Chattopadhyay (1982) argued that in almost all parts of the country, a sexual division of work characterizes even agricultural activity. It also noted the nature of payment to the labourers on the basis of gender. Balaraman (1985) reveals that on an average, the wages paid to a female worker was roughly 60 to 80 per cent of the wages paid to a male worker. In agricultural sector, there is discrimination that is largely operated through open wage discrimination.

Lakshmi Devi (1989) cites evidence to show that in Kerala, discrimination exists in employment opportunities as well as in wages received in agriculture and in construction. Even though there is increase in wage rates of agricultural labourers in Kerala, there is discrimination between male and female in wages. Agarwal (1989) made a study on low wages, on gender basis. Despite lower employment and earnings for women in India, over the decade the men/ women disparity in employment and earnings has gone down, more so in case of earnings.

Raju (1991) noticed a lower disparity in earnings in Kerala in 1974-75. This accompanied by relatively greater fall as compared to males, in their contribution to wage labour. The female deprivation is of different nature. The bias towards women workers is expressed not through discriminatory wage structure, through employment strategy, which discourages hiring of women in the first place.

Choudhary (1993), Das (1985), Government of Pondicherry (1997) and Pandey *et al.* (1985-86) reassessed the wage differentials and discrimination towards the male and female labourers. The wages paid to the female labourers is low compared to male workers. Terrell (1992)

also showed the difference in wages paid to the females and existence of the discrimination against women workers in all sectors including agriculture. Mukherjee (1996) confirmed with the findings of the recent surveys that gender based wage discrimination continue, even for identical tasks performed by men and women, such as weeding or even a typical female labour intensive such as transplanting. There is discrimination not only in wages but also in all aspects of life.

A number of scholars Mencher (1978), Raghavan (1971), Alexander (1973), Namboodri (1978) Jose (1977), Marakkar (1974) and Government of Kerala (1994) revealed the participation, growth, importance, economic conditions of agricultural labourers and the gains through the trade union. They also analysed the measures taken by the government to support the agricultural labourers in Kerala on gender basis. George (1984) studied in depth the progress of political struggles in order to gain in wages of agricultural labourers. He tried to find out the importance role of political struggles in the process of increasing wages.

Kannan (1988) made an attempt to find out the role of trade union and the gains of agricultural labourers in Kerala. This study also analysed the wage structure,

condition of employment of agricultural labourers. The working of trade union in Kerala is a gain on wage aspect, but it creates some additional burden on labourers. The landlords and the rich farmers control the days of employment available to the labourers.

2.1.7 Caste and Work

Saradmoni (1980) analysed the relation between caste and work in agriculture sector in Kerala. Most of the agricultural sector belongs to the socially backward families. It also examined the emergence of slave caste. There is a close relationship between caste and agricultural work and therefore the status of these workers is also related to the work and caste. Lebra *et al.* (1984) in their work, "Women and Work in India" analysed the availability of employment to females in various sectors and found that a substantial proportion of the agricultural labourers belongs to the socially disadvantaged caste. The backward and socially disadvantaged caste female workers engaged in agriculture because of their economic backwardness and poverty.

Bose (1985) conducted a study covering poor house holds from four villages in West Bengal and focused on caste hierarchy and sex based division of labour among

agricultural labourers and poor peasants. The socially disadvantaged caste and class do the work in agriculture as hired workers. Majid (1986) examined the contribution of labourers in terms of cash and kind. This study is also confined to women who engaged in cultivation activities.

Nirmala Bhai (1986) made an attempt to assess the importance of Harijan women in independent Indian agriculture. These socially backward women are engaged in agricultural fields and low paid occupations because of their lack of education, skills and knowledge. In India, the socially backward groups do most of the agricultural field works. The socio-economic factors compel them to enter into low paid occupation like agricultural labourers.

Radhakrishnan (1989) identified the lower polluting casts, with no or little land, who worked as agricultural labourers. The low standard of living of these poor labourers pushes them to enter into the labour force. The main activities performed by these female workers are as agricultural labourers. In most of the regions of the world, these female labourers do the farm operations at low wages and they have irregular seasonal employment. Their socio-economic condition can be analysed on the basis of caste and work they performed Ramamchandran (1990)

discussed the importance of female agricultural labourers. Their economic contribution to different spheres is very important and valid. This study mainly concentrated on the socio-economic status of the socially backward female workers.

Prakash (1992) and Kumar (1992) concentrated their study mainly on the genesis and growth of agricultural labourers in India. They put forward the reasons, which are responsible for the emergence and growth of agricultural labourers. In Malabar region, there is increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers and most of them were from low and socially disadvantaged castes. This also analysed the impact of colonization and changes that takes place in the work force in the economy.

Jain *et al.* (1997) analysed the relation between the work and caste in a society. The scheduled caste women engaged in low paid occupations and due to their lack of education, productive assets, economic resources, they have low socio-economic status in the society. Bhat (1997) noticed the agricultural set up of Palakkad district of Kerala. This study investigated the conditions of agricultural labourers. This mainly concentrated on the social status of the agricultural labourers.

2.2 Data and Research Methodology

2.2.1 Data Source

Data collected for this study belong to two categories: primary and secondary. Primary data has been collected from 300 female agricultural labourers, to examine the socio-economic conditions, to analyse the current problems of these labourers and to find out the changing role of these labourers in the context of land reforms. For the purpose of primary data collection, a field investigation was conducted in six selected village panchayats of Palakkad district. And also conducted discussion with the labourers in groups and observed various points in the discussion with the land lords, farmers, officers of Krishi Bhavan, taluk officers and with the members of the interviewee's family.

2.2.1.1 Collection of Data

Data is collected with the help of a carefully prepared interview schedule (see Appendix II) which related to age, education, marital status, economic factors and condition, financial, social, occupational and caste status of the respondents. The questionnaire was pre tested on fifty women workers in Palakkad. The interview schedule, which

attempted to elicit information on all points. The schedule was modified in the light of the pre testing before it was finalized and used. There are several problems faced during the fieldwork. The most important one was the identification of the households where the respondents lived. In order to find out their houses (huts) the researcher approached the local people especially the farmers and the neighbours.

At first, they did not open frankly. The questionnaire was filled up after the informal discussion with the respondents. The data collected on the basis of the information given by the respondents was then analysed. During the fieldwork, the questionnaire used in Malayalam language. The fieldwork of the study was conducted from June 1998 to March 1999. The respondents were met personally at their houses. The items on which information was collected included, besides basic socio-economic data, the role of respondents in making important decisions in the family, both money centered and children centered and the freedom she has in spending and control on family income.

Primary data, wherever necessary, supplemented by secondary data which are collected from various official publications of Bureau of Economics and Statistics, State

Planning Board, Kerala Agricultural University and other published and unpublished materials in the form of reports by National sample survey organization, census Department, Labour Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture, Books, Journals and Periodicals devoted to female agricultural labourers.

2.2.2 Research Methodology

2.2.2.1 Meaning and definition of the key terms

‘Agricultural Labourer’ is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised, work in agriculture and other agricultural operations like farming, dairy, poultry, horticulture and live stocks excluding work in fisheries, on wages for a larger part of the year and whose income are derived mainly from wage labour. Labour can be divided into male and female on the basis of sex.

The unorganised sector, which provides low wages, irregular jobs, casual nature of work and absence of social security. Agricultural labour includes in unorganised sector.

On the basis of the nature of work, agricultural labourers can be classified into three categories: field

workers, ordinary labourers and skilled labourers. The field workers include ploughmen, sowers, weeders transplanters and reapers. The ordinary labourers are employed in building embankments, digging and silt clearing. The carpenters, Masons and black smiths are included in the category of skilled labourers.

There are mainly two types of field workers:

Permanent labourers: These labourers are hired generally through out the year, is paid either in cash or in kind or in both.

Casual Labourers: They fulfill the need for additional labour at peak periods of farm operations. They are temporary workers and are paid at a rate fixed for an eight hours a day. The wage rate varies from one region to another and at different times of the year.

2.2.2.2 The Sampling Frame Work

The present study is with respect to female agricultural labourers in Palakkad district of Kerala. The selection of study areas has been done on the following grounds. Agriculture is one of the major sectors in Palakkad district, which provides direct employment to the

people especially to females. The district is known as one of the granaries of Kerala state. According to 1991 census, 70.17 per cent of the female workers in Palakkad returned as female agricultural labourers, which holds a unique position among the districts of Kerala. Palakkad district is a backward district and the proportion of scheduled castes is also high in Palakkad.

Palakkad district consisted of five taluks, among them three taluks, viz., Alathur, Chittur and Palakkad are selected on the basis of the concentration of paddy cultivation and female agricultural labourers. For the purpose of present study, two-stage stratified sampling procedure is adopted for the selection of development blocks, village panchayats and female agricultural labourers from three taluks of this district.

In the first stage, a sample of two development block are selected from each taluk. Six village panchayats, one from each development block are selected depending on the criteria of concentration of female agricultural laborers. The selected village panchayats and blocks are Kizhakkencherry (Alathur Block) and Thenkurissi (Kazhalmannam Block) from Alathur taluk, Nallepally (Chittur Block) and Muthalamada (Kolengode Block) from

Chittur taluk and Elappully (Malampuzha Block) and Parali (Palakkad Block) from Palakkad taluk.

In second stage, a list of farmers was obtained from each centre and from that 20 farmers are selected. From those farmers, researcher collected a list of 200 female agricultural labourers from each village panchayat. Sample sizes of each panchayat were divided in proportion to the degree of concentration of female agricultural labourers. The sample labourers from the sample size designed for each panchayat were randomly selected. Thus a total of 300 female agricultural labourers have been selected as ultimate stage of sampling for primary investigation. The following chart shows the structure of selected samples from Palakkad district of Kerala.

Taluk	Development Block	Village panchayat	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Alathur	Alathur	Kizhakkencherry	70	23.33
	Kuzhalmannam	Thenkurissi	30	10.00
Chittur	Chittur	Nalleppally	65	21.67
	Kollengode	Muthalamada	35	11.67
Palakkad	Malampuzha	Elappully	55	18.33
	Palakkad	Parali	45	15.00
Total	6	6	300	100.00

All the labourers are interviewed with the help of a multidimensional interview schedule, which gives an insight into the problems and socio-economic conditions of the female labourers. The available literature on women in agriculture was extensively used to understand the conditions and problems faced by these labourers. However, emphasis is given to the data collected with the help of the structured interview schedule.

2.2.2.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data have been analysed in a number of closely related operations according to the nature of the response. Different kinds of response have been grouped into a number of categories and counts are made of the number of cases falling in the groups. These results are then summarized in the form of statistical tables. Tabulation has been done entirely by manual method (hand tabulation). Wherever relationships between two variables are desired to be seen, cross tables or break down tables has been prepared.

Test of significance

The Chi-square test has been used to establish the association between the variables. The quantity Chi-

square describes the magnitude of the discrepancy between theory and observation. It is defined as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

where 'O' refers to the observed frequencies and 'E' refers to the expected frequencies. The calculated value of χ^2 is compared with the table value of χ^2 for given degrees of freedom at a certain level of significance. In order to test whether or not the attributes are associated we take the null hypothesis, that there is no assumption in the attributes under study or in other words, the two attributes are independent. If the calculated value of χ^2 is less than the table value at certain level of significance (generally five per cent level), the hypothesis that the attributes are not associated holds good. On the other hand, if the calculated value of χ^2 is greater than the table value at a certain level of significance, the result of the experiment does not support the hypothesis or, in other words, the attributes are associated. It should be noted that χ^2 is not a measure of the degree or form of relationship, it only tells whether two principles of classification are or are not significantly related, without reference to any assumption concerning the form of relationship. The level of significance for acceptance

of relationship is five per cent. Where Chi-square could not be applied or where the tests are self-explanatory the data was presented as such and no statistical test is applied, where simple statistical methods such as averages and percentages are used.

Quality of Life Index

A quality of Life Index is constructed to identify the poor families from among the respondents on the level of their living. Quality of life index is measured on the basis of housing and related facilities like drinking water facilities with in the house, sanitation facilities, electrification, ownership of agricultural land, household assets and live stocks and have been constructed by giving appropriate scores to individual variables. A household who have below 20 aggregate scores have been taken as poor. There are six main variables and ten scores are given when the answer is 'yes' and a zero score is given if answer is 'no'.

The maximum score of variables is 60. The different scores differentiate the households as poor (when score value is below 20), moderate (if the value is between 20 and 40), and good when the score value is between 40 and 50 and very good when it is 50 and above. The

selected variables and the allotted scores to each variable in order to construct Quality of Life Index can be seen from Appendix I.

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CHANGING PATTERN OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR - AN ANALYSIS

Lilly. P. V. "Role of women in agriculture- A case study of female agricultural labourers in palakkad district of Kerala " Thesis. Department of Economics, Dr. John Matthai Centre Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER III

CHANGING PATTERN OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR – AN ANALYSIS

3.1 Economic Development and Female Labour Force Participation

Women labour is the co-agent of political and economic change. As the Report points out:

Investing in women's capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development.

(United Nations, 1995: iii)

The economic development of a country depends upon the quantity and quality of its labour force. In developing countries, the women's share in labour force is rising (ILO, 1985; 1988-99), although still smaller than that of men and still smaller than in the industrialised market economies. Between 1970 and 1990, the labour force participation rates of women rose in North Africa, West Asia, East Asia and Latin America (ILO, 1995). Most of the developing countries are characterised by an increasing

share of unorganised sector in economic activities. This sector is considered to be an important sector for employment promotion and income generation, especially to women. Being an important segment of economic activity, it possesses vast potential for generating economic resources and employment opportunities and raising purchasing power of many weaker sections of the society.

The Table (3.1) shows the structure of female labour force in different economies of the world. In 1980, the female participation is high in Europe and central Asia (47 per cent). However, the female participation rate is low in Middle East and North Africa (24 per cent). In 1996, the rate is high in Europe and Central Asia (46 per cent) followed by East Asia and Pacific (44 per cent). In low income economies, the share of female work force is 40 per cent in 1980 and 1996. In high income countries, the female participation increased from 38 per cent in 1980 to 43 per cent in 1996.

Table 3.1 Structure of Female Labour force in Different Economies of the World

Major Economic Region	Total (Millions)		Female (percent of labour force)	
	1980	1996	1980	1996
Low Income	1153	1604	40	40
Excluding China and India	315	478	40	40
Middle Income	509	695	37	38
Lower Middle Income	367	494	39	39
Upper Middle Income	142	201	32	35
Low and Middle Income	1663	2299	39	39
East Asia and Pacific	704	966	42	44
Europe and Central Asia	215	234	47	46
Latin America and Caribbean	130	201	28	33
Middle East and N. Africa	54	89	24	26
South Asia	389	546	34	33
Sub Saharan Africa	171	263	42	42
High Income	372	440	38	43

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators, 1998. p.52.

In African countries, Rwanda holds an unique position in the share of female labour force (51.6 per cent) and followed by Burundi (51.2 per cent) and Republic of Tanzania (50.1 per cent). In America, the share of female work force is highest in Bahamas (49.2 per cent), followed by Canada and Jamaica (47.9 per cent) and Barbados (46.9 per cent). In Asian countries, China secured the highest share in women's work participation (55.7 per cent). In Thailand and Cambodia, female work participation is 55.5 per cent and 52.2 per cent respectively. In Europe, Czech Republic and Sweden shared the highest share in female labour force participation, that is 51.4 per cent, followed by Denmark (51.3 per cent) and Iceland (51 per cent) (ILO, 1998-99).

3.2 Female Labour Force in India and Kerala

Expansion of employment opportunities has been an important objective of development planning in India. It is realised that larger and efficient use of available human resources in the most effective way to achieve poverty eradication, reduction in inequalities and sustenance of a reasonably high pace of economic growth. Women contribute greatly to the economy. According to the census data, the work participation rate of females steadily rose

(Table 3.2) from 14.22 per cent in 1971 to 19.67 in 1981 and to 22.27 in 1991. The rise in work participation of rural females has been even steeper from 15.92 in 1971 to 26.79 in 1991. The rise in work participation in urban females over the two decades is some what less impressive. Out of the 22.27 per cent female labour participation in 1991, main workers contributed 16.03 per cent and marginal workers 6.24 per cent.

Table 3.2 Female Labor Force in India (1971-1991)

Year	Rural/Urban	Persons	Females
1971	Total	34.17	14.22
	Rural	35.33	15.92
	Urban	29.61	7.18
1981	Total	36.70	19.67
	Rural	38.79	23.06
	Urban	29.99	8.31
1991	Total	37.50	22.27
	Rural	40.09	26.79
	Urban	30.16	9.19

Note: Excludes Assam and Jammu and Kashmir where the 1981 and 1991 census, respectively could not be held.

Source: Census of India. 1991, series - 1, India paper 3 of 1991.

While participation of main workers increased between 1981 and 1991 both in rural and urban areas, marginal work participation increased only in rural areas but remained unchanged in urban areas at around one per cent. It is significant to point out those women constituted 90 per cent of the total marginal workers. Regional variations are wide, the female total work participation rate ranging from as high as 34 per cent to as low as four per cent among the major states.

According to 1991 census, the population of Kerala State is 290.98 lakhs against 254.54 lakhs in 1981. The scheduled caste population of Kerala according to 1991 census is 28,86,522, that is 9.9 per cent of the population of the state. The proportion of scheduled caste population is the highest in Palakkad district (15.9 per cent) and the lowest in Kannur (4.1 per cent) (Gok, 1997). According to 1991 census, Kerala has the highest sex ratio (1040) and density of population (747 sq.km). In terms of the social indicators of development, Kerala stands out first among the Indian states and much ahead of all India. In 1991, Kerala state achieved a literacy rate of 89.9 per cent. The literacy rate among males and females in Kerala is 93.62 per cent and 86.17 per cent respectively. The literacy level of

scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the state stood at 69.38 per cent and 48.62 per cent (ibid.).

In spite of the better health and educational status, the female labour force participations rate and percapita income in Kerala is very low and it has the highest unemployment rates for both men and women (Kannan, 1988; Oommen, 1994). As can be seen from Table (3.3) female participation in Kerala State has also been declining more or less continuously. However, while women's work participation in Kerala was some what higher than in the country as a whole at the turn of the century, it is no longer so now. In 1981 and 1991, fewer women (17 per cent and 16.9 per cent respectively) were found to be economically active in Kerala. It is note worthing that while work participation rate for women is lower now in Kerala than in the country as a whole, the urban rural difference is less sharp in this regard in Kerala. For the country as a whole, female labour participation rate for urban is less than half that for rural where as in Kerala state the urban rate is two-third of the rural rate.

Table 3.3 Proportion of Female Labour Force in Kerala
(1961 - 1991)

Year	Men	Women
1961	47.2	19.7
1971	45.2	14.6
1981	45.3	17.0
1991	47.8	16.9

Source: Census of India 1961, 1971, 1981.

Census of India, Kerala. Table 2 of 1991

3.3 Labour Force Participation Rate in Palakkad

The work force participation rate and occupational structure shows a distinct trend, which again is an indicative of relative backwardness. The district of Malappuram in Kerala reported labour force participation rates lower than that of Kerala, where as Ernakulam and Palakkad have registered higher participation rates. Among these districts, the highest male participation rate is in Ernakulam and the lowest in Malappuram. On the other hand, female participation rate found to be higher in Palakkad (24.7 per cent). The Table 3.4 shows the labour

force participation rate in Palakkad district of Kerala state during 1971 and 1991.

Table 3.4 Percentage Distribution of Labour Force Participation in Palakkad 1971 and 1991

Year	Total	Male	Female
1971	35.89	49.06	23.42
1991	36.9	49.7	24.7

Source: Census of India, Kerala, 1971, Series 12, Kerala 1991.

3.4 Change in Female Labour Participation in Various Sectors

Women constitute an integral part of social structure, not only because of their importance in the perpetuation of human race but also by virtue of their significant contribution to socio-economic progress of the country. The main difference between the developed and developing economies of the world is that, in former economies, most of the women workers are engaged in secondary and tertiary sectors and in latter, the majority of women labourers are concentrated in agriculture.

Table 3.5 Composition of Female Labour Force by Industrial Classification

Major Economic Regions	Per cent of Female in					
	Agriculture		Industry		Services	
	1980	1994	1980	1994	1980	1994
Low income countries	80	76	10	12	10	12
Excluding China and India	79	75	7	8	14	17
Middle income countries	32	29	24	21	44	49
East Asia and Pacific	75	72	12	13	13	15
Europe and central Asia	27	22	31	30	42	48
Latin America and Caribbean	-	12	-	16	-	71
Middle East and North Africa	53	55	10	11	29	29
South Asia	82	75	10	15	8	10
Sub-Saharan Africa	80	75	4	4	17	21
High income countries	8	4	23	18	66	75

Source : The World Bank, World Development Indicators, 1998. p.60.

As economy develops, the work participation is less in agriculture sector and the rate increases in other two sectors of the economy. In high income countries, the percentage of females in agriculture was eight per cent in 1980 and it decreases to four per cent in 1994. The representation of female labourers in agriculture is very important in low income countries. In 1980, the percentage share of female workers was 80 per cent and 76 per cent in 1994. Nearly 80 per cent of economically active women in Sub-Saharan Africa, and at least half in Asia, except west are in agriculture (ILO, 1995). The labour absorption in different sectors in different economies depends upon the nature of the economy. The Table (3.5) shows the composition of female labour force by industrial categories in different economies of the world in 1980 and 1994.

3.5 Female Labour Force Utilisation in Indian Economy

India has a total working population of 314.90 millions in 1991. Of this, 26.82 millions belong to the organized sector. The remaining 288.08 million belongs to the unorganized sector (GOI, 1978-93). Indian economy is an agrarian economy and it cannot disagree with the role and contribution of female workers in its development.

Table 3.6 Percentage Distribution of Indian Female Labour Force by industrial classification.

Industrial Categories	1971		1981		1991	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
Cultivators	43.4	29.7	41.6	33.2	38.7	34.6
Agricultural Labourers	26.3	50.5	24.9	46.2	26.1	44.2
Livestock, Forestry and Fishing	2.4	2.6	2.3	1.8	2.1	2.1
Mining and Quarrying	0.5	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.3
Total primary	72.6	83.1	69.4	81.6	66.5	81.2
Manufacturing						
a) Household industries	3.5	4.2	3.5	4.6	2.4	3.5
b) Non-household industries	5.9	2.9	7.8	3.5	7.7	3.8
Construction	1.2	0.6	1.7	0.8	1.9	0.7
Total Secondary	10.6	7.7	13.0	8.9	12.0	8.0
Trade and commerce	5.6	1.9	6.3	2.0	7.5	2.2
Transport, Storage and communication	2.5	0.3	2.7	0.4	2.8	0.3
Other services	8.7	7.0	8.6	7.1	10.2	8.3
Total Tertiary	16.8	9.2	17.6	9.5	20.5	10.8
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India 1971, 1981 and 1991

Everywhere, societies divide labour by gender. Most of the activities also are gender specific (Vani, 1997). The occupational structure of female labourers indicate the predominance of women in agriculture and to lesser extent in the service sector. The Table (3.6) shows the percentage distribution of female labour force by industrial classification in India from 1971 to 1991.

One of the most striking features that could be seen from the Table (3.6) is that among female labour force, agricultural labourers are the largest single group absorbing the highest proportion of females. At the same time, the proportion of female agricultural labourers to total female workers has continuously declined during the period. In secondary sector, household and non-household industry jointly absorb relatively less during the two decades.

3.6 Female Labour Utilisation in Kerala Economy

Kerala economy has followed an indicative growth pattern, especially in sectoral growth. There has been considerable attention drawn to the rapidly expanding service sector over the past three decades. At the same time, growth in the primary and secondary sectors has

Table 3.7 Percentage Distribution of Female Labour Force by Industrial categories in Kerala (1971-1991).

Industrial Categories	1971		1981		1991	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
Cultivators	17.8	4.6	13.1	5.0	12.3	5.6
Agricultural Labourers	30.7	49.1	28.2	43.6	25.5	36.1
Livestock, Forestry and Fishing	7.0	5.4	9.6	6.2	9.2	6.2
Mining and Quarrying	0.5	0.2	0.8	0.3	1.0	0.8
Total primary	56.0	59.3	51.7	55.1	48.0	48.7
Manufacturing						
a) Household industries	4.3	8.1	3.7	7.6	2.6	5.9
b) Non-household industries	11.4	12.3	12.2	12.8	11.6	14.8
Construction	1.7	0.3	3.0	0.7	4.0	0.9
Total Secondary	17.4	20.7	18.9	21.1	18.2	21.6
Trade and commerce	9.1	2.0	11.0	3.3	12.6	4.6
Transport, Storage and communication	3.9	1.0	5.0	1.6	6.0	1.5
Other services	13.6	17.0	13.4	18.9	15.2	23.6
Total Tertiary	26.6	20.0	29.4	23.8	33.8	29.7
Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Census of India, Kerala Series, 1971, 1981 and 1991

remained moderately stagnant (Kumar, 1997). The Table (3.7) represents the occupational classification of female labour force in Kerala from 1971 to 1991.

From employment point of view, non-agricultural sectors, that are industry and service, are more important in Kerala state. The female employment in 1991, compared to 81.2 per cent in the primary sector for India as a whole, the corresponding percentage in Kerala was as low as only 48.7 per cent. At the same time, females also participated in tertiary sector at an increasing rate of 20 per cent in 1971, 23.8 per cent in 1981 and 29.7 per cent in 1991. As compared to past decades, women's participation in non-agriculture and service sector is also increasing.

3.7 Women in Agriculture Sector – A Country-Wise Analysis

The participation of women labour force in agriculture sector is very significant in developing countries than that of developed countries. In many developing economies, women contribute as much as 80 per cent of the labour in agriculture and allied activities (Fruzzetti, 1985). The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, held in Rome in 1979, recognized the vital role of female labourers in the socio-economic life of agricultural

economy as a pre-requisite for their improved living standard (Chackacherry, 1997).

Women are employed in agriculture in large numbers. Most developing countries are at the early stage, where a high proportion of women are employed in agriculture. Even though, there is a declining trend in the share of agricultural sector to the national income, agriculture continues to be of vital importance for feeding the growing population of the world (Birla Institute of Scientific Research, 1980: Whyte and Whyte, 1982: Devaki Devi, 1994). While the male workers moved to non-agricultural sector, women have continued in agriculture. In the absence of economical and plenteous labour, the participation and contribution of women to agricultural operations become essential (Das, 1976).

The substantial subscription of the female agricultural workers is crucial to their families, society and to the economy. Most of the rural women retained in agricultural activities, but little of their activities are recorded in official economic statistics of the country. Rural female workers spend about two-thirds of their time in economically productive activities. Women took most of the agricultural operations with their men folk especially

transplanting, weeding, harvesting and processing the crops (Das and Gupta, 1995).

Female labour force participation in agriculture depicts distinct regional sequences. In Asian countries, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal and Pakistan, Women comprise about 40 per cent of the agricultural labour force. But in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Republic of Korea and Turkey, it comprises about 50 per cent. In India, women make up one third of the agricultural labor force. In south East Asia, women have traditionally participated in rice cultivation. The proportion of women among agricultural wage labourers in India (44 per cent) Sri Lanka (40 per cent) Malaysia (39 per cent) and Thailand (35 per cent) is fairly high (Das and Gupta, 1995; Punjabi and Sadhu, 1988).

In Sub-Saharan African pattern presents an intensive participation rate of women labourers in agriculture. About half of the agricultural labour forces are women in Gambia, Mali, Ivory Coast, Desotho, Malawi and Zaire. However, in Botswana, the United Republic of Tanzania, Cameroon and Sierra Leone, females comprise with well over half of labour force. In Gahana, Senegal, Togo and Upper Volta, women emprise between 42 to 46

per cent of the agricultural labour force (United Nations, 1985).

The agricultural sector play an important role in developing economies of the world. In this sector, poor women capture an important share (Wigna Raja, 1990). The Table (3.8) shows the distribution of female labour force in agriculture in different countries. The distribution of labour force reveals some interesting patterns. Agriculture accounts for the largest share of female employment in much Africa and Asia.

Table 3.8 Percentage Distribution of Country-Wise Labour Force in Agriculture

Country	1980		1994	
	M	F	M	F
Albania	54	62	51	60
Algeria	27	69	18	57
Angola	67	87	65	86
Argentina	17	3	16	3
Armenia	21	21	24	11
Australia	7	4	6	3
Austria	9	13	6	8
Azerbaijan	28	42	27	36

Bangladesh	67	81	59	74
Belgium	4	2	3	1
Bolivia	53	53	48	45
Botswana	53	74	39	55
Brazil	41	26	28	14
Burundi	88	98	86	98
Cambodia	70	80	69	78
Canada	6	3	4	3
Central African Republic	79	90	74	87
Chile	20	2	20	5
China	71	79	69	76
Cuba	30	10	24	8
Denmark	10	3	7	3
Ethiopia	90	89	86	86
France	9	7	6	4
Gambia	77	93	74	92
Germany	6	8	4	4
India	63	83	59	74
Indonesia	59	56	54	56
Iraq	21	62	12	39
Japan	8	13	5	6
Myanmar	72	97	70	96
Nepal	91	98	91	98

New Zealand	13	7	13	7
Pakistan	56	73	45	72
Philippines	61	37	54	31
Russian Federation	19	13	17	10
Rwanda	88	98	86	98
Saudi Arabia	45	25	20	12
Senegal	74	90	70	86
Singapore	1	1	0	0
South Africa	18	16	16	10
Sri Lanka	41	44	29	32
Tanzania	80	92	78	91
United Kingdom	3	1	3	1
United States	5	2	4	2
Zambia	69	85	68	83
Zimbabwe	63	85	58	81

Note: Male - Per cent of Economically active male population

Female - Per cent of economically active female population

Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators, 1998 pp. 58 - 60.

Women's participation is greater in agriculture than in the non - agriculture sector in most Asian countries. The proportion of the female working population engaged in agriculture and related activities range from 50 per cent in Korea and Sri Lanka to over 80 per cent in India, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia and Nepal (Das and Gupta, 1995). The female labour force participation and women's share of the work force tends to be large in countries where women's contribution to family agriculture are defined as work. This is particularly evident in Africa, where several countries report more than 90 per cent of the female work force in agriculture, resulting in high regional participation rates. Women in agriculture and unorganised sector warrant special consideration in cross country comparison of women's share in the workforce.

3.8 Female participation in Indian Agriculture Sector

Women participation in agriculture is one of the important sign of women's role in agriculture. While considering the importance of female participation in rural economy, we must analyse their role and contribution to the economy as whole. In India, large proportion of working women is in rural areas and their major source of employment and revenue is agriculture. In the national

level, almost 80 per cent of women are engaged in agriculture and related activities (Arunkumar *et al.*, 1994; Chackacherry, 1997; Rangarajan, 1998).

Indian labour force, which is comprised of women, especially those belonging to the poor section of rural society (Rao *et al.*, 1994). The contribution of rural as well as urban female labourers is invisible and also visible. Women are engaged in organized and unorganized sectors of the economy. Most of them were in unorganized sector and make an important contribution to the economic output of the economy. This contribution is visible from economic point of view. The socio-economic development of rural India is very much related to the women's labour force, participation and their contribution to the society (Kothari, 1997).

The largest proportion of the working force is still attached to the agriculture sector, but census counts that between 1971 and 1981, while male cultivators and agricultural labourers taken together as a proportion of male work force declined from 67.5 per cent to 62.3 per cent, the corresponding decline in the female work force is only nominal, from 80 per cent to 79.4 per cent. A striking point is that rural women's work participation

continues to be their concentration in agriculture sector. So agriculture continues to be a major field for women's employment (GOI, 1995; Samanta, 1995).

In rural India, agriculture is the main source of employment and income to the people. Most of the rural poor women are engaged in agriculture in order to supply income to the family (Sheth, 1994). Rural economic development of India is closely connected to the work and contribution of female labourers and they act as the backbone of the rural economy of India (Ibid; Kapila, 1998). The Table (3.9) represents the participation rate of female labourers in Indian agriculture. In recent years, women have remained very substantially in agriculture (Rao and Gulati, 1998). In 1993-94, the male workforce engaged in agriculture is 58.3 per cent, but the female rate is 78 per cent. However, in rural areas, the female rate increased from 84.8 per cent in 1987-88 to 86.1 per cent in 1993 – 94. No doubt, nearly 80 per cent of India's population lives in rural areas and is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture.

Table 3.9 Percentage Distribution of Female Work Force of Given Category in Agriculture (usual status)

Year	All Workers	Rural Workers
1972-73	84.3	89.7
1977-78	81.8	88.2
1983	81.2	87.8
1987-88	77.7	84.8
1993-94	78.0	86.1

Source: Based on N.S.S. Round in different years

3.9 Female Labour Participation in Kerala Agriculture Sector

Kerala state is divided into 14 districts. These districts are again divided into 61 taluks and 1362 revenue villages. Agriculture sector forms the backbone of the rural economy of Kerala. As compared to other states, Kerala has very low employment opportunities in agriculture sector (George, 1992). According to the 1991 census, 41.5 per cent of the females and 36.5 per cent of the males are employed in agriculture sector. It is important to note that a number of changes that have been taken place in Kerala economy over the years. The Table (3.10) shows the tremendous changes that happened in Kerala economy especially in labour force participation from 1961 to 1991.

Table 3.10 Female Work Participation in Agriculture and Allied Activities and Non-Agricultural Activities in Kerala (1961-91)

Primary Sector				Non-primary sector			
1961	1971	1981	1991	1961	1971	1981	1991
48.94	59.10	55.29	47.89	51.05	40.89	45.03	52.10

Source: The Indian journal of Labour Economics, 1999. p. 168.

There is a sharp decline in the share of agricultural and allied activity employment, a large portion of the workforce released by the agricultural sector, is however, absorbed by the tertiary sector (Mathew, 1996). In 1991, the proportion of female work force in primary sector is 47.89 per cent. However, the percentage engaged in non-primary sector increased from 45.03 per cent in 1981 to 52.10 per cent in 1991. This is due to the high density of population and the consequent reduction in the area cultivated, the relatively low growth in agriculture, the greater proportion of cash crops cultivation which is less labour intensive and the fall in the total cropped area in the state of Kerala (Lakshmi Devi, 1996).

3.10 A Comparative Analysis of Agricultural Employment Structure of India and Kerala

The participation of women labour is very crucial in the process of development. Women's employment is a true index for their economic conditions in the economy. (GOI, 1995; Singh and Gupta, 1995; Unni, 1992). Rural females spend about two-thirds of their time in economically productive activities. Men took the major responsibilities in farm work and usually the work of transplanting, weeding, manuring, harvesting, threshing and processing the crops done by women (Vohra and Sen, 1986; Banerjee, 1995).

The character and pattern of employment in agriculture has been analysed by Rural Labour Enquiries in different periods. The extent of wage employment in agriculture can be seen from the Table (3.11). According to the First rural Labour Enquiry (1964-65) only 149 days of paid employment is available to women in agriculture as against 217 days for men. During this period, the days available to rural labourers are 161. During the VI Rural labour Enquiry Period (1993-94) the number of days available to women agricultural labourers is 220 and 247 for men. The extent of wage employment days enjoyed by the female labourers was lower than that of male workers during these period.

Table 3.11 Extent of Wage Employment in Indian Agriculture

(in days)

Type of labour	Sex	I RLE (1964-65)	II RLE (1974-75)	III RLE (1977-78)	IV RLE (1983)	V RLE (1987-88)	VI RLE (1993-94)
Agricultural labour	M	217	193	229	227	231	247 ^(p)
	F	149	138	186	190	157	220 ^(p)
Rural Labour	M	219	192	229	227	230	237 ^(p)
	F	161	136	186	189	157	215 ^(p)

RLE: Rural labour Enquiry. P – provisional

Source: Labour Statistics, The Indian Journal of Labour Economics 1998, p.404

The zonal wise division of the country reveals the difference in the pattern of employment in agriculture. The extent of employment days allotted to the females is different from one zone to another. In 1974-75, the female agricultural labour in Assam gets 277 days of wage employment. As compared to agricultural labourers, non-agricultural labourers get more days of employment. The level of employment in agriculture has a declining trend in most of the states and zones. In all India level and in Kerala, the condition is the same that the days of employment in agriculture is decreased compared to non-agricultural sector (GOI, 1975).

The distinctive character of the agriculture sector of Kerala deserves a special emphasis. The high pressure of population on land has rendered a large part of rural population traditionally dependent on agriculture either employed or unemployed. The economic and social condition of a worker including females is depends upon the volume of employment. A good wage system alone cannot provide adequate income to the workers; it also depends upon the available volume of employment (Kannan, 1988). The employment in agriculture sector is a true index of standard of living of the poor workers and their family members. Employment in agriculture is determined by

various factors such as irrigation facilities, features of soil, climate, cropping pattern, and the policy of land owners and cost of production (Report, 1988; Alagh, 1999). Different crops have different intensities for labour Employment. Paddy is the most important labour intensive crop in Kerala. A major portion of female labourers is accounted for rice cultivation.

Despite of the large number of non-agricultural workers in Kerala, agricultural labourers constitute the important segment of the rural economy. High wages combined with less employment and other problems like absence of other employment opportunities, low level of education and poor family background, forced the poor women to enter and to continue in agriculture (Patrick, 1998). In Kerala state, 64 per cent of the employment in paddy cultivation belongs to women (Gopalan, 1995). The demand for women labour is in an increasing trend in traditional cultivation activities (Mencher, 1985). The female agricultural labourers do not get employment through out the year (Subramanian, 1997). In Kerala, there is seasonal demand for females for agricultural operations. They are employed mostly during the weeding and harvesting seasons. In rice growing areas, the women labourers regularly seek employment for the survival of their

households (Dessinger, 1990). The Table (3.12) shows the extent of employment in agriculture in Kerala.

Table 3.12 Extent and pattern of Employment in Kerala
Agriculture Sector

Period	Sex	Agricultural Labour Households		Rural Labour Households	
		Agricultural labour	Other Rural labour House holds	Agricultural labour	Other Rural labour House holds
1964-65 RLER	M	198	231	196	220
	F	165	222	164	223
1974-75	M	169	193	168	205
	F	128	151	126	170
1983-84	M	147	182	146	197
	F	115	186	112	198

Note: RLER - Rural Labour Enquiry Report

Source: Rural Labour Enquiry Report, 1974-75; RLE, Kerala, 1983-84.

It is clearly stated that the employment over the years has declined for all rural labour particularly the agricultural labour categories in Kerala since 1964-65. The report of Rural Labour Enquiry shows a decline in the available days of employment for male as well as female

agricultural workers in Kerala. During 1974-75 and 1983-84 shows a further decline in the annual employment for all types of labourers. However, the decline in the employment days of other rural labourers is less than that of agricultural labourers.

In Kerala, the average number of days of available employment of agricultural labourers ranges from 119 days in Malappuram district to 155 days in Idukki and Wyanad. In the case of other rural labourers, the number of days of employment ranges from 154 days in Malappuram to 279 days in Ernakulam (Vaidyanathan, 1989). The Table (3.13) represents the distribution of employment days in agriculture in selected districts of Kerala. In Alappuzha, a male agricultural worker gets an average of 73 days and 108 for female. In Palakkad, women get 91 days, male employed for 84 days. The female labourers in Kannur district get an average of 73 days against 80 for a male agricultural labourer. This shows the deplorable condition of agricultural workers in Kerala, because of the increased wage rates alone cannot provide better living condition to the agricultural labour house holds.

Table 3.13 District wise distribution of Agricultural Employment in Kerala

Districts	Number of days of annual Employment		
	Male	Female	Average
Alappuzha	73	108	92
Palakkad	84	91	88
Kannur	80	73	75

Source: Cited in Jose George, 1992, p.99.

The declining trend in the average days of employment of female agricultural workers are due to various land reforms, increase in population, mechanization, reduction of employment hours as a method to reduce higher cost of production, labour troubles, non-profitability of paddy cultivation because of lack of remunerative prices for paddy, large scale pauperization of the poor peasantry and due to the crisis in traditional industries (GOK, 1985). Due to increase in wage costs, farmers accepted a plan of crop substitution in favour of less labour absorbing crops. During 1970 and 1990, area under paddy cultivation has declined nearly 30 per cent and by mid 1990s by 40 per cent. This intensified the deteriorating employment situation of agriculture sector.

During the mid 1970s and early 1980s, agricultural labourers lost around 35 million man days and during the mid of 1990s, they lost 50 million man days (Kannan, 1998). As compared to other workers, female agricultural labourers in Kerala get less employment opportunities (George, 1992). The drastic fall in the area under paddy cultivation have more significant impact on female labourers in agriculture. This has meant a loss of income and percapita income of labour households (Kannan, 1988; James, 1997; Siddiq, 1996).

3.11 Nature and Status of Agricultural Employment in India

The most important fact concerning the employment in agriculture is the status distribution of workforce into self-employed, regular and casual workers. The main character of casual agricultural workers is that they remain without work for four to six months in a year (Agarwal, 1982; Unni, 1992). The agriculture gets feminised, the status of work women do in that sector is casual in nature (Srivastava, 1983; Banerjee, 1995; Report 1993). There has been increasing trend in casual labourers in rural agriculture sector (Unni, 1992) and the proportion of this kind of labour being higher among women (Sharma and Singh, 1993).

There is a tremendous increase of wage labourers in Indian agriculture due to the growing transformation of peasants into wage labourers. The decennial population census shows the increase in the number of agricultural labourers than that of cultivators (Parthasarathy, 1997). Accordingly, 1990-91 among principal status workers, casual workers formed 70 per cent of the total male workers and as high as 93 per cent of the total female labourers. The National Sample Survey data from 32nd to 50th Round also witnessed a further increase in the proportion of casual workers for both males and females. The increasing trend in casual agricultural workers can be seen from the Table (3.14)

The share of casual wage employment is in a rising trend and they are the lowest paid workers among agricultural workers (Gill, 1997; Ghosh, 1997). The increasing share of casual workers among males as well as females may reflect immiserisation of the workers. The low level of income and living shows the incidence of poverty among casual workers (Kundu, 1998). The nature and availability of employment is a good index of economic welfare and development of rural workers.

Table 3.14 Distribution of Usually Employed Rural Female Workers in Agriculture.

(in thousands)

National Sample Survey Round and year	Principal Status			All		
	Self Employed	Regular Employment	Casual Labour	Self Employed	Regular Employment	Casual Labour
32 (1977-78)	563	37	400	621	28	351
38 (1983)	541	37	422	619	28	353
43 (1987-88)	549	49	402	608	37	355
45 (1989-90)	567	32	401	611	28	361
46 (1990-91)	545	35	410	586	30	376
50 (1993-94)	513	34	453	585	28	387

Source: National Sample Survey Round in different years

3.12 Casualisation of Workforce in Kerala

The proportion of casual wage labour out of total wage workers are found to have increased in almost agricultural areas (Jose, 1988). The increasing female proportion with low wage, mostly casual and seasonally fluctuating agricultural labour, reflects not just the rising landlessness but also the poor work options for the female poor. Amongst the uneducated and unskilled women, most of them are engaged in agriculture, were casual workers and helpless and have no alternatives in other industry divisions. The most important characteristics of the employment in agriculture are insecure, unstable, and contributing to a great extent of irregular employment. They often do monotonous jobs and earn less (Gopalan, 1995).

The agricultural labourers holds a unique place in agricultural system, who are subdivided into permanent farm servants and hired casual labourers, paid according to the time spend or work done (Lukose, 1982). The year to year fluctuations in employment and real wages of casual workers indicate their low income, level of poverty and misery (Unni, 1988).

Table 3.15 Percentage distribution of Workers Usually Working by Status in Agriculture
- Kerala

Category	1977-78			1983			1987-88		
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P
1. Self Employment									
a. Agriculture	24.3	14.3	21.3	20.9	16.8	19.7	20.2	18.9	19.8
b. Total	44.8	33.8	41.5	40.3	31.6	37.8	41.0	36.1	39.6
2. Regular Employment									
a. Agriculture	2.7	3.2	2.8	2.8	4.3	3.2	0.9	1.5	1.1
b. Total	18.2	17.8	18.0	19.8	21.3	20.2	17.0	19.0	17.5
3. Casual Employment									
a. Agriculture	23.3	34.1	26.1	25.1	30.3	26.6	24.4	28.8	25.1
b. Total	37.0	48.4	40.5	40.0	47.1	42.0	42.0	45.0	42.8
4. All workers									
a. Agriculture	50.3	51.6	50.7	48.8	51.4	49.5	45.7	49.1	46.6
b. Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

- Source: 1. National Sample Survey Report - II Quinquennial survey on Employment and unemployment: survey Results, Kerala, July 1983.
2. National Sample Survey, February, 1988.
3. Sarvekshana, January, 1992, State Series, Kerala.

There is certain gender difference in the employment status in Kerala. Even though, there is gradual decline of employment in agriculture, the proportion of female workers in self-employment rose from 14 per cent in 1977-78 to 18.9 per cent in 1987-88. There is a fact that the rice cultivation, which has traditionally offered maximum casual employment to female workers. In agriculture, the proportion of female labourers engaged in casual employment has declined from 34.1 per cent in 1977-78 to 28.8 per cent in 1987-88. The regular employment in agriculture has been quite insignificant for both male and female workers in Kerala; this can be seen from the Table (3.15).

3.13 A Comparative Analysis of the Changing Female Agricultural Workers of India and Kerala

Even though there is increasing trend in secondary and tertiary sector, agriculture has continued to be the main source of livelihood for all workers, especially for the majority of the women workers (Rao, 1983; Kulkarni, 1997). Most of the unskilled women workers are in agriculture sector. In India, agriculture accounts 65 per cent of the total employment, of which the women's share is 82 per cent (Sundaram, 1997). It is a fact that agricultural female workers play an important role in the process of

economic progress. They are the active partners in human culture and socio-economic prosperity of Indian economy (Singh and Singh, 1995).

As a whole, it is noted that the female agricultural workers are the agent of production. They supply labour in the process of production, produce output to the economy, give food and fodder to the living population, add income to the family members for their subsistence in the form of wages. Their economic participation and income is a real support to the family and the economy. And also they play their role in order to get foreign exchange to the exchequer. As a whole, they help to contribute towards economic, social, political, moral and ethical prosperity of the society (Sisodia, 1985).

Workers engaged in agriculture sector include both cultivators and agricultural labourers. There are nine distinct classifications of data on main workers, but according to 1991 census, this division confines to only four major categories. They are cultivators, agricultural labourers, household industrial workers and other workers. The first two divisions relate to agricultural sector and the last two to non-agricultural sector. India, still

Table 3.16 Proportion of Agricultural Workers in India and Kerala (1961-1991)

Categories	INDIA							
	1961		1971		1981		1991	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Cultivators	51.46	55.72	46.24	29.69	43.70	33.20	39.72	34.15
Agricultural Labourers	13.42	23.86	21.35	50.40	19.59	46.18	21.11	44.29
KERALA								
Cultivators	22.91	16.25	21.81	4.64	15.81	5.07	14.2	5.6
Agricultural Labourers	13.10	27.42	25.10	49.06	23.38	43.03	22.4	36.1

Source: Census of India, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991

predominantly an agricultural economy, Kerala has a little over half of the all India average with only 38.04 per cent. But in both cases, the proportion has declined from 1981 by 1.65 per cent for all India, and 3.26 per cent for Kerala. Kerala is predominantly a non-agricultural economy; the major components were plantations, fishing, household industry and other services. The Table (3.16) shows the proportion of males and females as cultivators and agricultural labourers in India and Kerala from 1961 to 1991.

At the all India level, the proportion of male agricultural labourers has shown an increase, but there is a marginal decline in the case of Kerala. The figures for all India and Kerala levels show a decline in the proportion of female agricultural labourers over the decade. One of the most striking similarities that could be observed from the table is that among the female workers agricultural labourers are the largest single category, the highest proportion of females both at the state as well as national level. The phenomenon persistently holds good through out the period under study except in 1961. However, in both cases the proportion of female agricultural labourers to total female workers has continuously declined during the period. At the state level, the proportion declined from 49.1 per cent

in 1971 to 43.6 per cent in 1981 and further to 36.1 per cent in 1991 showing a total decline of 13 per cent points. While at the national level, the respective decline was from 50.5 per cent in 1971 to 46.2 per cent in 1981 and further to 44.2 per cent in 1991 showing a total decline of 6.3 per cent points only. An overall analysis of the changing labour force composition reveals that work opportunity of female workers continued to remain confined mainly to the agricultural sector and it ranged from 71 to 80 per cent of the total female employment. Compared to the category of agricultural labourers, sex ratios in the category of cultivators are less favourable to women.

In Kerala, agriculture has always been market conscious. The period 1960-61 to 1970-71 had seen a significant expansion of cultivation from 49.9 per cent to 56.3 per cent of the total geographical areas. During this time, the area of cultivation is mainly used for cultivating cash crops at an increased level. This period had also showed a dramatic increase in female wage labour. The proportion of female agricultural labourers increased two fold from 29.3 per cent to 53.4 per cent. But a growth of same magnitude was not seen in the case of male agricultural labourers. After 1970's, area under crops remained more or less stable, but the agricultural scenario

was marked by rapid changes in the cropping pattern. Area under paddy declined sharply and productivity stagnated as paddy lands were increasingly converted to cultivate cash crops like coconut and banana (Kannan, 1988). In 1971, there was an increase in hired agricultural labourers when paddy lands were intensively cultivated. After 1971, as the growth of cash crops became dominant, the wage labour, especially female agricultural labourers declined (Kumar, 1997). The Table (3.17) exhibits the changes in the proportion of male and female agricultural workers in Kerala since 1971.

Table3.17 Variation in the proportion of Agricultural Workers in Kerala (1971-1991)

Years	Sex	Agricultural work	Cultivators	Agricultural labourers
1971-81	M	-10.5	-22.3	-0.7
	F	+2.6	+21.6	+0.82
1981-91	M	+9.3	-0.61	+0.22
	F	-7.3	+1.71	-6.64

Source: Census of India, Kerala Table B-1 part A of 1971a, Table B - 3 of 1981a and Table B-1 of 1991a

3.14 Inter District Variations in Agricultural Employment in Kerala

Among the districts of Kerala, the proportion of male agricultural labourers is higher in Palakkad with 32.63 per cent closely followed by Thiruvananthapuram (31.47 per cent) and Malappuram (30.53 per cent). In rural areas, Thiruvananthapuram district has the largest proportion (40.04 per cent) among the districts of Kerala. In urban areas, Pathanamthitta district tops with 21.06 per cent of its main workers returned as agricultural labourers.

In the case of female agricultural labourers also Palakkad district holds a unique position with 70.17 per cent. Malappuram holds the second position with 52.50 per cent and the last by Kollam with only 18.90 percent. In rural areas the proportion of agricultural labourers in Palakkad district is still higher with 73.31 per cent and Kollam district holding the same rank as far total with 21.75. In urban areas, Palakkad district tops with 45.48 per cent of its main workers returned as agricultural labourers as against the state urban average of 15.8 per cent. The Table (3.18) represents the proportion of agricultural workers to main workers in 1991.

Table3.18 District wise proportion of Agricultural workers
in Kerala (1991)

State/ Districts	Male		Female	
	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers
Kerala	14.38	22.61	5.74	35.76
Kasargode	15.41	24.39	6.33	25.19
Kannur	9.72	15.71	7.63	38.92
Wynad	21.42	28.42	8.91	45.61
Kozhikode	6.77	12.65	3.32	19.49
Malappuram	14.63	30.53	5.92	52.50
Palakkad	14.81	32.63	7.67	70.17
Thrissur	10.84	17.72	5.09	36.38
Ernakulam	10.93	12.71	4.19	25.83
Idukki	23.76	21.41	7.72	24.58
Kottayam	18.58	21.68	3.36	32.88
Alappuzha	10.60	21.56	2.49	30.93
Pathanamthitta	29.94	25.67	7.75	35.09
Kollam	19.78	24.46	4.47	18.90
Thiruvananthapuram	12.71	31.47	7.78	24.17

Source: Census of India, Kerala series 12, paper 2 of 1991 p. 92

In Kerala, the proportion of cultivators is far lower than all India with 26.05 per cent points. In the case of agricultural labourers, the proportion is slightly lower in Kerala with 0.83 per cent points. However, the proportion of both the household industrial workers and other workers in Kerala show a high figures with 0.26 and 26.62 per cent points which is higher than all India level.

3.15 Agricultural Workers in Palakkad District of Kerala

The survival in the developing regions depends on the work women do. Women contribution to agricultural development is quite significant even as they work under severe limitations. The sectoral occupational distribution especially as agricultural labourers in Palakkad is typical of the livelihood pattern of a backward economy. The role of female workers in agriculture is more significant and active (Nambiar, 1992).

Palakkad was the main rice producing region in Malabar districts of the Madras Presidency. The census figures show that the phenomenon of substitution of female for male labourers exists in Palakkad (GOI, 1991). The agriculture sector of Palakkad district is characterized by the involvement of a large proportion of the population in agriculture with a low income. One of the important

features of the rice growing taluks of Palakkad district is the preponderance of labour, especially the female labour at various stages (Saradmoni, 1989). The main reason is that the wages of women workers in paddy cultivation is relatively low and their greater dexterity in several agricultural operations. The Table (3.19) explains the distribution of workers in Palakkad district.

Table 3.19 Distribution of Agricultural Workers in Palakkad district (1991)

Total, Rural & Urban	Persons	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Total
	Male Female			
Total	P	97737 (12.54)	347702 (44.60)	779682 (100.00)
	M	78688 (14.81)	173319 (32.63)	531171 (100.00)
	F	19049 (7.67)	174383 (70.17)	248511 (100.00)
Rural	P	92017 (13.81)	322753 (48.44)	666333 (100.00)
	M	74042 (16.60)	161132 (36.14)	445880 (100.00)
	F	17975 (8.15)	161621 (73.31)	220453 (100.00)
Urban	P	5720 (5.05)	24949 (22.01)	113349 (100.00)
	M	4646 (5.45)	12189 (14.29)	85291 (100.00)
	F	1074 (3.83)	12769 (45.50)	28058 (100.00)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of workers to total workers

Source: Census of India, Series 12, Kerala Paper, 2 of 1991.

The agricultural workers constitute the largest single group among the total main workers in Palakkad. Female labour participation in agriculture sector is found to be higher in Palakkad than the male workers. Palakkad still have a predominantly agricultural base especially in rural areas, where there is the number female agricultural labourers in this district is still higher with 161621 that is 73.31 per cent.

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FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND WAGE STRUCTURE - AN OVERVIEW

Lilly. P. V. "Role of women in agriculture- A case study of female agricultural labourers in palakkad district of Kerala " Thesis. Department of Economics, Dr. John Matthai Centre Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER IV

FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND WAGE STRUCTURE – AN OVERVIEW

India is one of the developing countries, whose economy depends mostly on agriculture. Most of the working population especially women in our economy belong to agricultural sector (Agarawal, 1980) Agricultural labour and farm cultivation are the main areas of economic activities for rural women. The National sample survey has shown that the percentage contribution of women in agriculture is higher than men, where they do most of the key operations at farm. The significance and increasing participation of women in agriculture has been explained in the third chapter of this study. However, the female agricultural labourers happen to be the most backward, exploited and also the most neglected of the rural economy. Therefore, in this chapter an attempt is made to analyse the influence of various factors especially wages on the lives of female agricultural labourers and their families.

4.1 Female Agriculture Labourers - A State-Wise Analysis

The occupational structure of female workforce indicates the domination of women in agriculture. Even though there is an increasing trend in secondary and tertiary sector of the economy, agriculture has continued to be the main source of livelihood for all workers, especially for the majority of the women workers (Rao, 1983). Most of the unskilled women workers are in agriculture sector. In India, agriculture accounts 65 per cent of the total employment, of which, the women's share is 82 per cent (Sundaram, 1997). The growth rate of agricultural labourers among females is much above the percentage increase in the total female population. The Table (4.1) shows the percentage distribution of female agricultural labourers in different states and union territories in rural as well as urban areas.

Table 4.1 Percentage Distribution of Female Agricultural Labourers in Indian States (1981-1991)

State/Union Territory	1981			1991		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
India	46.34	50.36	16.65	44.29	48.83	15.00
Andhra Pradesh	59.07	62.02	27.88	59.66	63.23	12.25
Arunachal Pradesh	1.99	2.02	0.78	5.03	5.14	2.34
Assam	NA	NA	NA	13.49	14.07	3.51
Bihar	63.33	65.61	23.17	57.92	60.12	23.31
Goa	18.49	23.01	5.40	16.75	21.84	6.82
Gujarat	48.08	53.98	15.09	44.38	49.84	13.31
Haryana	22.00	25.72	5.49	24.81	29.04	6.33
Himachal Pradesh	1.71	1.70	0.78	2.21	2.25	1.32
Karnataka	49.72	55.04	21.25	49.06	55.09	17.99
Kerala	43.55	48.38	14.21	36.16	41.74	15.80
Madhya Pradesh	40.61	42.34	18.63	37.33	39.11	19.01
Maharashtra	46.61	49.77	16.86	43.59	48.63	14.41
Manipur	7.29	7.21	7.69	12.89	12.27	15.40
Mehalaya	10.91	11.55	3.73	14.47	15.56	3.63
Mizoram	2.16	1.17	8.36	3.38	1.90	5.82
Nagaland	0.32	0.28	1.34	5.07	5.29	2.84
Orissa	54.24	57.21	19.45	54.73	57.50	19.72
Punjab	25.29	42.59	4.09	21.90	34.09	3.99
Rajasthan	15.67	16.60	7.04	18.23	19.37	8.24
Sikkim	3.06	3.21	0.85	7.78	8.13	0.90
Tamil Nadu	53.43	60.07	18.73	52.02	59.80	14.84
Tripura	32.07	35.33	1.54	30.70	34.78	3.19
Uttar Pradesh	35.23	38.03	9.22	35.13	38.27	9.52
West Bengal	39.43	48.44	3.45	37.50	45.47	4.39
Andaman and Nicobar Island	2.25	3.37	0.14	3.74	5.23	0.13
Chandigarh	0.41	15.98	0.08	0.37	4.28	0.19
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	15.12	15.35	10.03	14.99	15.33	6.50
Daman and Diu	18.26	25.32	3.31	9.23	13.75	3.34
Delhi	12.5	13.52	0.35	10.2	9.66	0.38
Lakshadweep	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pondicherry	56.16	78.76	19.56	49.60	78.27	18.04

Source: Census of India, Kerala Series 12, paper 2 of 1991.

This attributed to the fact that land being limited and more rural labour force, which hails from farming families are now working as agricultural labourers. Even though, there is increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers in majority of the states and union territories, at the same time, this proportion has declined in Goa, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, West Bengal, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu and Pondicherry.

4.2 Role of Women in Agricultural Operations

Women are employed in various agricultural operations like from transplanting to harvesting and the level of employment of female agricultural labourers is mostly related to the extent and intensity of rice cultivation (Ganesh, 1990). Their role in agriculture is so significant that without them almost nothing could be done on the farm, as traditionally majority of male worker of the regions do not participate in working on the farm except ploughing and related works. Women are employed in different activities in crop production such as land preparation, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and winnowing.

In Kerala, female labour activity is primarily confined to cultivation of food crops, especially in rice

cultivation. Their domination in tasks such as transplanting, weeding and post harvesting activities like threshing have made these as sex typed occupations. Thus, in Kerala where paddy cultivation requires around 90 per cent of hired labour, roughly 75 per cent is provided by female labour. As a whole, in Kerala a male worker gets 41 man days employment for ploughing and two days for sowing. However, from transplanting to harvesting indicates an average per capita employment of 76 days for women labourers in crop activities, against only 18 days for each male worker. The operational wise employment to the worker is always changing from time to time and from region to region (Vaidyanathan *et al.*, 1989). At the same time, the total available works offered to male workers is higher than the female workers.

On farm, labour utilization of female workers depends upon the cropping pattern and area under cultivation. In crop production, women have a main role to play as they exclusively do most of the operations. In local paddy, female workers generally devote their time in weeding and hoeing. In some regions, local paddy is transplanted if irrigation facilities are made available. Exclusively the female workers do the transplanting work. Similarly, the female labourers also do harvesting. Men

associate themselves with agriculture mainly at the time of ploughing, sowing and marketing operations, all the other operations being carried by women.

The study of the female agricultural labourers can be conceived as a study of women at a level where caste and gender inequalities coincide. Female agricultural labourers in terms of caste together with male agricultural labourers are placed very low in agrarian hierarchy, in terms of gender they feel the burden of poverty and exploitation more heavily than male agricultural labourers (Rai, 1987). Indian labour market witnessed the fact that the control of women's labour is on the basis of caste system. The socially backward women are poor and they entered into wage work to raise the economic level of their family (Desai and Patel, 1985). Women participation rate in work force is determined by the economic as well as socio-cultural factors. Women from poor families and socially backward groups generally worked as agricultural labourers. The upper caste women do not participate in wage employment especially as agricultural labourers. So ultimately caste, class and gender hierarchies and cultural and economic factors determines the female participation in Indian labour force (Singh and Singh, 1993; Gill, 1997).

Caste composition is another distinguishing feature of female agricultural labourers in Kerala. The scheduled castes constitute disproportionately to the poor households in rural economy. In rural areas, they largely remained as agricultural labourers (Vyas and Bhargawa, 1995; Kapadia, 1997; Saradamoni, 1981; Misra, 1988; Kannan, 1988; and Bhaskaranunni, 1988). The work participation rate among the scheduled castes is high (41.22 per cent) as against state average (31.43 per cent). The most important reason for this is the relatively higher participation of scheduled caste women. The participation rate of scheduled caste women is 31.73 per cent. Even though, there is higher work participation among scheduled caste women, the incidence of poverty is also relatively high among them, (GOK, 1997).

The occupational pattern of these labourers would reveal their relative economic backwardness. It is the fact that agricultural labourers constitute 25 per cent of the workforce in Kerala, at the same time, scheduled caste labourers constitutes 55 per cent of the workforce (Ibid.). Women's participation in paid work outside the home depends on the caste, class status, and most of them worked as agricultural labourers (Dube and Palriwala, 1999). In Kerala, the high caste women have been taking

non-traditional and non-family based occupations and the socially backward women are preferring more traditional occupations (Manuja Devi, 1997). The heaviest work in paddy cultivation was carried out by the socially backward groups, who have no right on the land, where they worked hard (Mencher, 1985).

Even though, there is an increasing trend of economic role played by rural women through their active participation in various agricultural activities and operations, the rural labour market is known to discriminate against female labourers both in terms of wages and employment. To be more precise, development increases inequality with in the rural society, where women section is the poorest one, doubly under privileged, first as members of rural poor and then as women.

4.3 Wage Rates in Agriculture

The concentration of rural women in agriculture are not only reflects the poverty and landlessness but also extremely limited options. The poor rural women have to be content with low paid jobs in agriculture as alternative supplementary occupations are just not available. Although, women work participation in rural areas

increased in recent times, it does not indicate the increasing level of income. Available evidence suggests that even when men and women perform the same task, the male labour receives a higher wage than the female worker.

The functioning of labour markets can be observed on the basis of four major characteristics-seasonal character in agriculture, prevalence of a subsistence wage, institutionally fixed real wage and dualism in agriculture (Pandya, 1997). Wages in agriculture, both in cash and kind can affect the real standard of living of the labourers on account of labour wage, which is the major source of income for the vast majority of the poor people. The operation of labour markets thus becomes all the more important. The wages they get profoundly influence the quality of life of the workers and their family members (Singh and Singh, 1993). Wages from agricultural operations are lower than that of non-agricultural operations. There has been also difference in wages on gender basis (Kaur and Goyal, 1996). The Table (4.2) shows the difference between the wages of agricultural and non-agricultural activities. The wages of female labourers is Rs. 15.18, which is lower than the wages of non-agricultural female labourers (Rs.16.21). There is also difference in wages of agricultural and rural labourers in India.

Table 4.2 Average Daily Earnings of the Workers in India
(1993-94)

(in rupees)

Particulars	Agricultural operations		Non-agricultural Operations	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Rural Labour Households	21.52	15.33	32.48	17.45
Agricultural Labour Households	21.34	15.18	29.95	16.21

Source: Labour Statistics, 1998. P. 405

4.4 Payment of Wages

In almost all parts of the country, even agricultural activity is characterised by a sexual division of labour. The tasks which are done exclusively by women are often back breaking and low paying, at the same time, tasks are done by men are better paid. While there are a number of jobs, which are done by both sexes, women are inevitably paid less than the men (Chattopadhyay, 1982). The Table (4.3) shows the average wage earnings per day received by the agricultural labourers in India.

Table 4.3 Operation-wise Average Daily Wages of Agricultural Labourers in India

Agricultural Operations	Rural Casual Labourers		Women Labourers (All India)		
	Male	Female	Total	Cash	Kind
Ploughing	21.42	19.39	-	-	-
Sowing	21.40	15.34	15.76	13.36	2.40
Transplanting	19.55	15.10	15.34	12.40	2.94
Weeding	18.35	12.96	13.06	11.22	1.84
Harvesting	20.81	15.97	16.03	11.23	4.80
Manual Work in cultivation	20.66	14.75	14.91	13.20	1.17
Other Agricultural Activities	21.00	14.72	15.45	13.90	1.56

Source: Labour Statistics, 1998, p.406.

National Sample Survey Organisation, 50th Round

It shows significant different in wages of male and females in the operations, in which both are employed. In weeding, women are earning Rs. 12.96 per day while men are getting Rs. 18.35 in rural India. The wages of women are lower than the wages of males even in operations, which are women intensive and are better performed by them such as weeding and transplanting. Significant variations are

noticed between wages for different activities. It shows that activities which are male dominated are paid more such as ploughing, sowing. Thus the economic rating of an operation is not done by the quality of work but by whether it is done by male or female.

4.5 Pattern and Growth of Money Wages in India

In agriculture sector, money wages are responsive to the changes in condition of demand and supply of labour (Bardhan, 1989). There has been an upward rise in agricultural wage rate both in cash and in kind. This is due to increase in agricultural productivity, political mobilization of workers and their constant struggles for improvement in wages, customs, social structure and non-contractual obligations and these enter into the process of change in the rate and mode of payment of wages in agriculture sector. There has been continuous improvement in money wages (Nayar, 1965). The annual money wage earnings per agricultural labour in rural households have been computed both in money and real terms by multiplying the average daily wage earnings by the full days of agricultural employment available to per worker in an agricultural year.

Table 4.4 State wise rural agricultural wage rates in 1987-88 and 1991

(in rupees per day)

States	Ministry of Agriculture (1991)			N.S.S (43 rd Round)					
				Regular			Casual		
	F	M	M-F	F	M	M-F	F	M	M-F
Andhra Pradesh	13.18	18.42	5.24	9.99	11.54	1.55	6.15	9.13	3.58
Assam	18.06	22.54	4.48	13.57	17.28	3.71	11.87	13.77	1.90
Bihar	17.09	19.23	2.14	9.29	10.01	0.72	8.41	9.99	1.58
Gujarat	16.32	19.04	2.72	10.40	11.94	1.54	8.96	9.42	0.46
Haryana	30.13	35.15	5.02	16.76	16.32	-0.44	13.13	16.40	3.27
Karnataka	13.27	15.51	2.24	7.71	11.92	4.21	5.81	9.13	3.32
Kerala	23.29	31.36	8.07	24.58	28.58	4.00	15.39	23.34	7.95
Madhya Pradesh	16.61	18.74	2.13	6.87	8.42	1.55	6.74	8.14	1.40
Maharashtra	14.23	20.12	5.89	8.23	14.97	6.74	5.96	9.77	3.81
Orissa	12.41	14.48	2.07	6.41	10.54	4.13	6.17	8.47	2.30
Punjab	27.08	37.11	10.03	10.81	17.29	6.48	14.51	18.93	4.42
Rajasthan	14.44	17.06	2.62	11.51	12.96	1.45	9.37	13.48	4.11
Tamil Nadu	12.11	15.41	3.30	6.53	10.83	4.30	6.14	10.83	4.69
Uttar Pradesh	19.11	21.34	2.23	6.85	11.81	4.96	7.71	10.42	2.63
West Bengal	19.13	21.34	2.21	13.81	12.78	-1.03	10.76	12.53	1.77
Average	17.76	21.79	4.03	10.89	13.81	2.92	9.14	12.29	3.15

Source: GOI, Ministry of Agriculture, 1992.

National Sample Survey, 43rd Round Survey, September 1990.

The rural wage rate in Indian states shows that the wages of female labourers are lower than their male counter parts and also there is variation in wages among the states of India. The money wages of female casual workers is lower than the regular workers. The Table (4.4) shows the money wages of agricultural labourers in Indian states. From the table, it can be seen that among all the states, the two north western states, Punjab and Harayana (Parmar, 1986) and also Kerala from the south consistently maintained a high average level of money wages. Relatively low level of money wages have all along been reported especially for the period until 1990-91 from the states like Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, much the same trend emerges in the case of wages of female labourers.

4.6 Changes in Real Wages of Agricultural Labourers

Real wages for the agricultural labourers have been estimated by deflating the agricultural money wages by the consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers. The average real wages for unskilled agricultural labour that reflect the economic condition of agricultural labourers. The vast majority of rural Indian females are still dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. Compared with males,

females continue to have lower real wage rates in most states of India, which indicates the significant burden on women. The real earnings in 1987-88 are substantially higher than in 1977-78. The picture is similar in respect of rural females working as casual labourers. (Agarwal, 1998; Singh, 1987; Desrocher and Joseph, 1988).

The real wage rates of adult male in agriculture rise up to 1990 and fall in 1991 and 1992. There are slight variations in Gujarat, Kerala, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the rise is observed in 1992 and stagnation thereafter. A more or less similar picture of stagnating real agricultural wage rates is also seen for adult females in most Indian states. The trend of real wages can be seen from the Table (4.5). At all India level, the rate of male wage earnings to female wage earnings in agriculture was 1.7 in 1964-65. It declined steadily to 1.3 in 1987-88. However, the wage ratio ceased to decline thereafter and stagnated in most Indian states till 1995. It shows that the advantage of rising female wage earning rates in agriculture has ceased. The declining real wages in the agricultural sector as a whole implies less favourable conditions of employment for female agriculture labourers.

Table 4.5 State wise real Agricultural Wage Rates of Adult Females (1987-1995)

States	1987	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Andhra Pradesh	2.3	2.2	2.6	1.8	2.3	2.0	1.9	1.8
Bihar	-	-	3.4	2.3	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.7
Gujarat	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.6	2.4	2.0	1.7	1.7
Haryana	-	-	-	-	-	2.5	2.5	2.4
Karnataka	-	1.7	1.6	1.0	1.0	1.4	1.4	-
Kerala	2.3	2.2	2.0	1.8	2.7	2.1	2.4	3.1
Madhya Pradesh	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.8
Maharashtra	-	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.4	2.1	1.7	1.9
Orissa	1.0	1.5	1.4	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5
Punjab	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rajasthan	1.2	1.8	1.7	1.5	-	-	-	-
Tamil Nadu	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.2	-	1.1	1.2	1.1
Uttar Pradesh	1.9	2.1	2.1	-	1.3	1.4	1.7	1.6
West Bengal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: GOI, Ministry of Agriculture, Agricultural Situation in India, (Various issues)

The prices of staple consumption, supply of agricultural labour, productivity per worker, unionisation and the level of non-farm employment are the factors that can influence the real wages of the labourers (Parthasarathy, 1997). The important reasons for the low rate of earnings of female labour in agriculture are the unorganised nature of farm labour, the ease with which hire labour can be substituted by family labour, the seasonal nature of the demand for labour and the traditional classification of some jobs as the monopoly of women (GOI, 1988).

4.7 Agricultural Sector and Wage Structure in Kerala

Wage is a notable factor that can influence the lives of female agricultural labourers. The important features that distinct the Kerala economy from the other states in India is the existing labour market. It has three features namely, rate of unemployment which is very high compared to the other states, Kerala has the third highest wage rate for agricultural labourers in the country and there is comparatively high rate of female participation in the labour force (Krishnan, 1992).

In Kerala, the existing wage rate of agricultural labourers is high, however, this rate is very low as compared to the wages of other sectors of the economy (Ramu, 1989). Though there is an increasing trend in wage rate, Kerala shows a declining trend of employment in agriculture sector (Tharamangalam, 1981). The wages of both men and women in Kerala shows higher figures than the other states, at the same time, there is discrimination against women workers (Nirmala *et al.*, 1998). The female agricultural labourers are the largest segment that receives low wages among the female labourers. These labourers are engaged in economic activities to alleviate the poverty from their families (Mancher, 1985). The wages and the available employment opportunities in agriculture sector determine the socio-economic conditions of these female labourers.

The supply of labour is the main factor that determines the existing wage rate in an economy. Kerala as a whole is characterised by the existence of high wages for agricultural and non-agricultural labourers (Sukumaran, 1997; Karan, 1997). The Table (4.6) shows the daily average earnings of females belonging to agricultural labour households in agricultural activities in India and Kerala.

Table 4.6 Average Daily earnings of Women belonging to Agricultural Labour Households in India and Kerala

Country/Region	1987-88	1993-94		
India	7.00	15.18	12.64	2.54
Kerala	13.44	30.10	24.97	5.04

Source: Labour Statistics, 1998. P. 408

The wages of female labourers in Kerala is higher (Rs.30.01) than Indian level (Rs.15.18) in 1993-94. Kerala has the highest wage rate after Harayana and Punjab (Krishnan, 1992). However, most of the workers feel that their wage rates are very low (Sukumaran, 1997). The wage rates of male agricultural labourers, the highest average for the year 1984-85 was reported from Harayana, followed by Punjab and Kerala. The same trend emerges in the case of female agricultural labourers. The women agricultural wage has been the highest in Harayana, followed by Punjab and Kerala (Jose, 1988).

4.8 Discrimination in Payment of Wages–A Comparative Study

An appraisal on the economic activities of men and women shows an unequal distribution in employment and wage. In case of women there is marginalisation in the agrarian economy, since they have little scope for mobility and education and also because of work segregation and relegation of women's task to their lower levels of the occupational hierarchy. Women are suffering from various discriminations specific to their class and sex. Majority of the women workers are engaged in unorganised sector (GOI, 1960; Gulati, 1993). The presence of sexual division of labour in agricultural operations was found to be having an impact on wage differentials between men and women (Singh and Singh, 1993; James, 1997). The Table (4.7) shows the discrimination against female labourers in the case of wages in agricultural operations in India and Kerala.

Table 4.7 Average Daily Wage Difference Between Men and Women in India and Kerala

(in Rupees)

	1950-51		1956-57		1964-65		1974-75	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
All India	1.09	0.68	0.96	0.59	1.43	0.95	3.24	2.27
Kerala	1.26	0.79	1.28	0.70	2.11	1.23	6.02	4.28
Ratio of Women's Earnings To Men's Earning (in percentage)								
All India	62.38		61.49		66.43		70.06	
Kerala	62.69		54.69		58.29		71.09	

Source: Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour, Rural Labour Enquiry, 1974-75, Final Report on Wages and Earnings of Rural Labour Households, Table 31 (a) - 1 pp. 102 - 103, Table 3.2 (a) -1, pp. 144-115.

In 1950-51, the average daily wages for men in Kerala is Rs. 1.26 and for women is 0.79. However, the following periods, the wages in Kerala is increasing than in All India for both sexes, at the same time, there are differences in wages between men and women in Kerala and India. In 1974-75, for men it is Rs. 6.02 and Rs. 4.28 for women.

4.9 A Comparative Study of Operational-Wise Wages in Kerala and India

Payment of wages is found to be varied between different operations. These variations reflect the difference in the nature of work, strain involved and urgency of the operations. The average wage rates of different agricultural operations earned by the male and female agricultural labourers of India and Kerala have been incorporated in Table (4.8). The average daily earnings are more in peak time operations like ploughing, harvesting and transplanting than in off-peak activities such as weeding and other activities, which are mainly female tasks. However, in a high wage activity like transplanting the labour input of women is substantial, but here also women's wages are lower than men's though women would come out better in productivity comparison. It is a fact that chances for the exploitation of labourers is more if they are paid by piece rate. The women labourers are much more disadvantaged not only in their daily wages but also in access to employment.

The wages that existing in Kerala is high as compared to all India level. Though there is an increase in the wages of females in Kerala for weeding (Rs. 92.61) in 1999, in other operations, they get low wages than males.

The unskilled female labourers in Kerala, get Rs.85.42, at the same time, in India they get Rs.43.50. As a whole, the male workers get high wages than the females in both Kerala and India. It is also important to note that there is variation in wages received by the two types of purely agricultural wage earners and the daily wage rate of an annual farm servant is higher than that of a casual labourer in Kerala (Chattopadhyay, 1977; Ray et al., 1985).

Table 4.8 Average Daily Wage Rates by Occupation and Sex in Kerala and India (September, 1999)

(in rupees)

Occupation	All India		Kerala	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ploughing	67.52	39.54	174.89	-
Sowing	60.12	51.03	148.28	88.93
Transplanting	53.34	48.57	-	89.39
Harvesting	59.16	51.35	122.50	86.50
Winnowing	54.51	48.08	-	73.33
Threshing	58.32	46.08	106.67	85.56
Unskilled Labourers	56.00	43.50	124.12	85.42

Source: Government of India, Indian Labour Journal, December 1999. Pp.1564 - 1569

4.10 Pattern and Growth of Agricultural Wages in Kerala

There is an increasing change in pattern of wages in Kerala. Among paddy field labourers, the wages of men workers increased only 19.5 per cent as against the increase of 21.5 per cent in the previous year (1995-96). The females wage increased by 18.3 per cent in 1996-97 as against the increase 22.10 per cent during the previous year. This shows that there is a marginal fall in the rate of wages of these labourers. The Table (4.9) shows the average daily wage rate of paddy field workers in agricultural sector from 1980-81 to 1996-97.

The Table (4.10) shows the growth rate in money wages of paddy field labourers in Kerala. During the first period (1963-64 to 1974-75) the growth rate of wages for both men and women is 10.13 per cent and 13.47 per cent respectively. During the second period (1975-76 to 1988-89), the growth rate of women's wage rate (12.04 per cent) showed a decline than that of male workers (15.48 per cent). However, third period (1989-90 to 1995-96) marked an increase in women's wage rate (16.95 per cent) than male workers (14.30 per cent). At the same time, the whole period shows 10.24 per cent growth rate in money wages of female labourers and 10.11 per cent for male workers.

Table 4.9 Average Daily Wage Rates of Paddy Field Labourers in Kerala

Year	Average Daily Wage		Per cent change over previous year	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1980-81	11.13	7.91	-	-
1981-82	12.74	8.83	14.47	11.63
1982-83	13.29	9.55	4.32	8.15
1983-84	15.86	11.02	19.34	15.93
1984-85	23.60	11.89	48.80	7.90
1985-86	26.08	15.10	10.51	27.00
1986-87	28.36	16.39	8.74	8.54
1987-88	30.36	16.39	7.05	7.87
1988-89	31.95	18.59	5.24	5.15
1989-90	33.31	19.63	4.26	5.59
1990-91	35.77	21.11	7.39	23.73
1991-92	41.38	26.12	15.16	7.54
1992-93	48.40	32.31	16.97	23.70
1993-94	54.26	35.49	12.11	9.84
1994-95	65.53	41.92	17.08	18.12
1995-96	77.17	51.17	21.47	22.10
1996-97	92.18	60.52	19.45	18.21
1997-98	103.72	69.35	12.52	14.59
1998-98	112.45	71.40	7.71	2.96

Source: GOK, Economic Review, in different years

Table 4.10 Growth Rate in Money Wages of Paddy Field Labourers in Kerala.

Sex	Period			
	First period 1963-64 to 1974-75	Second period 1975-76 to 1988-89	Third period 1989-90 to 1995-96	Whole period 1963-64 to 1995-96
Male	10.13	15.48	14.30	10.11
Female	13.47	12.04	16.95	10.24

Source: Cited in K.P. Kannan, EPW, 1998

In Kerala, money wage increases, but real wages does not increase to that level of money wages. This trend seems to show that the efforts of agricultural labourers to secure higher wages though increased money wages have largely been affected by different factors like loss of employment, inflation, high cost of production, economic crisis, low price for the agricultural products. (Jose, 1988; Unni, 1988). The increase in the level of agricultural output in the respective area, fall in prices of commodities combined with increased availability of employment should have raised the real wage earnings of agricultural labourers during that years (Ibid.).

4.11 Inter District Variations in Agricultural Wages in Kerala

In Kerala, the difference between the wages of males and females accounted for 66 to 85 per cent, especially in Alleppey, Kottayam and Palakkad districts of Kerala. The districts like Kannur, Ernakulam and Thrissur are known as the high wage areas for women. The difference is quite high ranging from less than half in Kannur to two thirds in other two districts. In high wage areas, there is high difference between the wages of male and female workers. In Kerala, Palakkad and Kazargod are the districts that have relatively very low wage rate than the state average rate. At the same time, Palakkad district of Kerala have low wage rate as well as low growth rate in Wages. (Kannan, 1988; Haque, 1998).

It is significant to note that the changes that in the wage rate for females vary from one district to another. In Alleppey, wages of female workers varied as to the proportion of wages of males and to a smaller extent in Palakkad, but in other districts similar trend cannot be observed. The trend is related to the rate of decline in employment opportunities. (Kannan, 1988). The Table (4.11) shows the district-wise distribution of Wages of paddy field labourers on gender and occupational basis. Idukki,

Palakkad and Kasargod are the low wage districts in Kerala. It shows significant differences in wages of males and females in different operations in different regions. The working hours which are allotted to the labourers are also different in various districts. In 1993, Kannur district shows a high wage rate in Kerala. In weeding, women in Kasargod and Palakkad districts are earning Rs.20 per day while women are getting Rs.45 in Kannur district.

Table 4.11 District Wise Distribution of Wages of Paddy Field Labourers in Kerala (1993)

District	Working Hours	Ploughing Male	Sower Male	Weeder Female	Other Agricultural Labour	
					Male	Female
Thiruvananthapuram	4-8	60	50	40	50	40
Kollam	5-8	45	45	35	50	50
Pathanamthitta	4-8	50	50	30	50	30
Alappuzha	6-8	60	50	40	50	40
Kottayam	4-8	50	50	28	50	35
Idukki	4-8	25	25	25	25	25
Ernakulam	4-8	50	50	35	40	40
Thrissur	4-8	50	30	34	63	36
Palakkad	6-8	30	30	20	35	25
Malappuram	4-8	50	-	40	60	40
Kozhikode	4-8	46	60	40	60	45
Kannur	4-8	80	70	45	60	55
Kasargode	4-8	31	31	20	31	20

Source: Government of India, Agricultural Wages in India, 1993, pp. 94-103.

During harvesting, wages have always been paid as a proportion of agricultural output. The government of Kerala authorised under section II (2) of the Minimum wages Act, to permit the payment of wages either wholly or partly in kind in harvesting operation (GOI, 1996). An important fact to note in Kerala is that there is a gradual rise in the share of workers. This reward is based on the piece rate system and the achievement of increased harvesting wages is a direct result of the union of agricultural labourers. If there is an increase in agricultural output that would be automatically shared by the labourers.

4.12 Minimum Wages and Agriculture Sector

In 1948, the subject o minimum wage Bill came into force in India. The second part of the schedule of this Act refers to employment under agriculture. As pointed out by the courts, the object of the Minimum Wages act of 1948 is to ensure payment of living wage to the labourer. The fixation is on the point of the worker and not on the capacity of the employer. (GOI, 1996; Sankran, 1997). Wage is not only as a part of the problem of raising the living standards of the labourers, but also an instrument of increasing the productivity (Nirmal *et al.*, 1998).

Although the minimum wages act was passed in 1948, followed by the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976, obtain minimum wages and equal remuneration is not yet reached through out the country, especially in the case o labourers those who are unorganised in nature. So in different states of India, exist different wage rates including agriculture sector (Bhagoliwal, 1995). In countries like India, male – female wage difference arise because of three reasons: Male productivity is higher than females, in case of female labour the reservation wage is lower than that of male labour and the bargaining power of the male workers is stronger than females (Ghosh, 1997).

With the enforcement of a minimum wage to the women, it will raise the money wages, at the same time there is no guarantee that there will a rise in their real income because it depends upon the variables like employment and the prices of goods and services they bought (Ibid.). During the 1990's, the minimum wages are fixed and revised from time to time by different state governments, which can be seen from the Table (4.12).

Table 4.12 State wise Minimum wages in agriculture during
1990's

(Rs. per day)

States	1989-90	1991-92	1993-94	1995-96
Andhra Pradesh	8.50 to 11.00	15.00 to 19.25	16.80 to 23.40	30.00 to 36.00
Assam	19.00	32.60	32.60	11.34pm
Bihar	16.50	16.50	16.50	27.30
Gujarat	11.00	15.00	15.00	15.00
Karnataka	12.00 to 17.65	12.00 to 17.65	12.00 to 17.65	26.00
Kerala	12.00 to 15.00	24.00 to 32.00	30.00 to 40.00	30.00 to 42.20
Madhya Pradesh	17.00	18.43	28.17	35.30
Maharashtra	12.00 to 20.00	12.00 to 20.00	12.00 to 20.00	12.00 to 29.00
Orissa	25.00	25.00	25.00	25.00
Punjab	34.47	37.53	40.12	55.58
Rajasthan	22.00	22.00	22.00	32.00
Tamil Nadu	14.00	14.00	14.00	20.00
Uttar Pradesh	18.00	18.00	23.00 to 25.00	33.00 to 35.00
West Bengal	21.17	22.88	26.95	37.00

Source: GOI, Ministry of Labour, Labour Bureau, 1996.

The better-off states like Punjab and Haryana fix higher minimum wages in each employment category. There are different state governments fix very wide differences across the states in the minimum wage rates; the wage rate varied from as low rate as R.15.00 in Gujarat t Rs.55.58 per day in Punjab. At the same time, even in better off states, the female labourers get lower than that of their male counter parts (Nirmala *et al.*, 1998).

The widening gap between the actual and minimum wages paid to the agricultural labourers is explained in terms of unorganised nature of the labourers and the ignorance of the workers. These factors also weaken their bargaining power. So there are different kinds of wage discrimination among the agricultural labourers especially in the case of female agricultural labourers in the country as a whole.

4.13 Minimum Wages Act in Kerala's Agriculture Sector

The better condition of any section of the population in a community is closely connected with its economic position. The women who belong to the poorer section and are engaged in the basic struggle for existence, especially in rural sector face a different type of problem.

The economic dependence is the main cause for their inferior place in the society. Under the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, many states have fixed minimum wages to be paid to the agricultural labourers including women according to the nature of operations to increase their economic position (GOI, 1996; CDS, 1987).

Unionisation has been largely responsible for the gains of agricultural labourers in Kerala. The gains include the coverage of minimum wages act and reduction in the number of working hours. As per the regulation of the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 (II schedule) minimum wages are to be fixed by the state governments for agricultural labour and the rates are to be revised from time to time. There is no uniformity among the states of India in the fixation and enforcement of minimum wages (Report, 1988). The average as well as the seasonal minimum wages are different in various regions and vary by age and gender within a region. (Bardan, 1989). The wages should be fixed on the basis of the factors like poverty, nutritional requirements, shelter, clothing, fuel, light, medical and educational expenses (GOI, 1988).

In Kerala, legislative measures were introduced in order to guarantee minimum wages and employment.

The Kerala Agricultural Workers Bill and settlement of Agricultural Disputes Bill was passed in November 1970. The important object was the maintenance of law and order in agriculture sector. The Agriculture Workers Act known as 'Magna Carta' of the toiling masses passed in 1974 by Kerala government. The acceptance of definite hours and regulation of mode of payment are the most significant characteristics of this Act with regard to the working situation (Kannan, 1988).

Minimum wages notifications have been prevailed in Kerala as on 3rd November 1994. The Minimum Wages Advisory Board revise the minimum wage rates payable to the employees employed in agricultural operations in the state as specified in the schedule here to be annexed and fixed on 1st April 1992 as the date on which the rates shall come into force. The important items, which are included in this, are the following.

The minimum wages for eight hours per day in agriculture has been fixed on the basis of the nature of agriculture operation. Those who are employed as labourers in operations like digging, loading, bund making, ridge making should pay Rs. 40.20. The operations like sowing, weeding, transplantation should get Rs. 30.00. However, the

working hours in Kole lands of Kuttanad area is up to five hours and six to eight hours in other areas of the state. The agricultural employees, those who had been getting wages and other benefits higher than the present minimum wages fixed as per the notification should continue and wherever the custom of paying wages in the form of kind must follow such tradition (GOK, 1994.)

While analysing the working of Minimum Wages Act, the National Commission on labour criticised the defective implementation of the Act. The reason for this is due to the poverty and illiteracy of the agricultural labourers, unorganised nature of the labourers, the causal nature of their employment and ignorance of the law, all of which apply particularly to women labour.

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SOCIO - ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS IN PALAKKAD DISTRICT OF KERALA

Lilly. P. V. "Role of women in agriculture- A case study of female agricultural labourers in palakkad district of Kerala " Thesis. Department of Economics, Dr. John Matthai Centre Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER V

SOCIO – ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS IN PALAKKAD DISTRICT OF KERALA

Palghat or Palakkad is one of the fourteen revenue districts of Kerala State with an area of 4482 Sq.Kms, Palakkad is the fourth largest district in the state. This district, situated almost in the centre of the state, has no coastal line. The district opens the State to the rest of the country through the Palakkad gap. This 32 to 40 Kms. wide natural gap in the 960 Kms. long Western Ghats is perhaps the most influential factor for the unique characteristics of the district such as climate, commercial as well as cultural exchanges between the state and the rest of the country. This district witnessed invasions of historical importance that have left indelible impressions on the history of Kerala.

Based on the physical features, the district is divided into two natural divisions – midland and highland. The midland region consists of valleys and plains. It leads up to the high land, which consists of high mountain peaks, long spurs, dense forests and tangled jungles. While Ottapalam taluk lies completely in the middle land region,

all other taluks in the district lie in the middle land and high land regions. The road and rail links between Kerala and Tamil Nadu pass through the Palakkad gap.

Palakkad district lies between north latitude $10^{\circ} 46'$ and $10^{\circ} 59'$ and east longitude $76^{\circ} 28'$ and $76^{\circ} 39'$. It is bounded on the east by the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, on the north and north-west by Malappuram district and on the south by Thrissur district. The climate of the district is tropical. Palakkad district has uniform rainfall as well. The soil of this district is mainly of four types, namely, peaty, laterite, forest and black soil. Peaty soil is found only in Thritala firka of Ottapalam taluk. Laterite is seen in the major portions of all taluks. Minerals like low grade iron ore, limestone and muscovita mica are found in different parts of this district. Bharathapuzha, the largest river in Kerala with her tributaries, flows through the entire district.

The flora of Palakkad district is characteristically tropical, owing to the seasonal rainfall, moderate temperature and the mountainous eastern border. Major portion of the district comes under the midland region and is under cultivation. The Silent Valley area, 40 Kms from Mannarghat town, has the distinction of being a rain forest,

very rare in the world. The forest region of Palakkad district is notable for its tribal population. Attappady is an important centre of tribal people.

Hinduism is the predominant religion in the district. Nearly 76 per cent of the population belongs to the Hindu community. All the sub castes of Hindu community are well represented in the district. The Muslim community is the second largest, forming 21.2 per cent of the population. The numerical strength of the Christian community in the district, according to 1971 census, is 45426. All most all sections of the Christian community are represented. The ceremonies connected with birth, marriage and death differ from one community to another. The restrictions based on caste and all communities observe religions generally.

Palakkad district, as an administrative unit, was formed on the first of January 1957, comprising of Palakkad, Perinthalmanna, Ponnani, Ottapalam, Alathur and Chittur. At present the Palakkad district consists of two revenue divisions, five taluks, 90 panchayats and 163 villages. There are thirteen development blocks in the district. The total population of the district according to 1991 census is 23,82,235 of which, the male population is

11,55,822 and female population is 12,26,413. The density of population is 532 per Sq. Km. Ninety per cent of the total population live in villages.

Palakkad district shows the growth rate of 5.8 per cent in 1996-97. The growth rate in the tertiary sectors is 5.2. The secondary sector growth is at 4.5 per cent. However, the primary sector growth is 6.7 per cent, which is higher than the other sector. The percapita income of Palakkad district at constant prices (1980-81) went up from Rs. 2032 in 1995-96 to Rs. 2121 in 1996-97. Palakkad district is one of the most economically and socially backward districts in Kerala. Most of the income derived from the agriculture and allied activities (GOK, 1997).

The effective total literacy rate of the district according to 1991 census is 81.21 per cent. The male literacy rate is 87.24 and female literacy rate is at 75.72 per cent. According to 1991 census, the proportion of scheduled caste population to total district population is the highest in Palakkad district (Ibid.). In Palakkad, the scheduled caste total literacy rate is 57.05 and male literacy is 63.62 and female rate is 51.07. The scheduled tribe total literacy rate is at 29.75 per cent. However, the male literacy

rate is 34.31 and female literacy rate is 25.10 per cent (Ibid.).

5.1 Agriculture Profile of Kerala and Palakkad District - A Comparative Study

In Kerala, 58 per cent of the geographical area has been categorized as net sown area. The total cropped area in 1995-96 has crossed 30.67 lakh tones (Ibid). The share of primary sector has decreased from year to year. During the sixth plan period (1980-85) the share was 33.79 per cent. At the same time, it has decreased to 30.86 per cent during the VIII plan period (1992-97). The main agricultural crops of this area are paddy and coconut. One to three crops of paddy are raised annually depending on the availability of irrigation facilities.

The first crop or virippu is grown from May to September, the second crop known as mundakan is obtained between September and February and the third crop called punja, which is an irrigated crop of comparatively minor importance between February and May. After harvesting the crop, the fields are prepared for the mundakan, which is more intensively cultivated crop. This second crop is gaining in importance as it provides great scope for intensive cultivation wherever the land resources

are limited. The third is restricted to small low-level areas where water supply is abundant during the summer seasons. The season-wise data on paddy cultivation reveals the reduction in area was more during virippu season. The area under virippu crop, which was 2.2 lakh hectares at the base year of VIII plan has declined to 1.6 lakh hectares in 1996-97. The area under mundakan decreased from 2.5 lakh to 2.1 lakh hectares and punja from 0.7 lakh to 0.6 lakh hectares.

District-wise analysis of the performance of the paddy shows that the productivity is higher in the districts of Palakkad (2291 Kg/hectare), Wynad (2199 Kg/ha), Kuttanad, a part of Kottayam (2165 Kg/ha), Pathanamthitta (2157 Kg/ha), Alappuzha (2055 Kg/ha) and Thrissur (2036 Kg/ha) than the state average (2023 Kg/ha). The districts of Kottayam, Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Palakkad, the traditional rice growing districts accounts for about two-thirds of the area under the paddy cultivation in Kerala. The most important reason for this is due to the major irrigation projects in Kerala is located in these districts.

5.2 Agricultural Profile of Palakkad District

Agriculture is the most essential and integral part of the life of rural economy. Rural economy is based on agriculture and allied activities and therefore, agriculture affects every aspects of their life. Palakkad district deserves an important place in the field of agriculture and production of paddy. Agriculture engages more than 65 per cent of the workers and 88.9 per cent of the district's population is rural in nature. Palakkad is one of the main granaries of Kerala and its economy is primarily agricultural for the following reasons: Palakkad district has been fortunate in having the greatest proportion of wet lands in which paddy cultivation is foremost, Palakkad district that gives the highest output of paddy when compared with the other districts of Kerala because the midland plains of Palakkad are so fertile and productive and though the rainfall is comparatively little, the district has good number of water resources and a good percentage of the population of the district are involved in agricultural operations (GOI, 1981 : GOK, 1976: Zachariah, 1992: George, 1992).

Agriculture sector showed improved performance in Palakkad district. The net cultivated area of the district is 284 lakh hectares, that is 64 per cent of the geographical

area. Major portion of the cultivable land is used for raising food crops. All food crops together account for about 80 per cent of the gross cropped area and paddy alone accounts for about 60 per cent of it. Coconut, groundnut, cotton, sugar cane, pepper, banana, rubber, arecanut and cashew are some of the major cash crops raised (GOK, 1996; GOK, 1997).

Paddy is the principal crop. It is cultivated in three seasons, namely Autumn (Kanni or Virippu), Winter (Kumbham or Mudakam) and Summer (Punja). The summer crop is also raised in some areas of the district (GOI, 1981). The season for the first crop of paddy (Virippu) is from April/ May to August/September. The second crop (Mundakan) is from September/ October to December/ January. The third crop (Punja) is from December/January to April/ May. The Table (5.1) shows the area of rice cultivation in three seasons in Palakkad district and in Kerala.

During 1998-99, the total area used in Kerala for rice cultivation is 352631 hectares, of which Palakkad accounts for 107467 hectares. In Kerala and Palakkad, more area of land is used for the cultivation of second crop, Mundakan.

Table 5.1 Area Under Rice Cultivation in Palakkad and Kerala (1998 - 99)

Seasons	Area utilized for rice cultivation (In Hectares)	
	Kerala	Palakkad
Virippu (Autumn)	120217	45915
Mundakan (Winter)	174714	55730
Punja (Summer)	57700	5822
Total	352631	107467

Source: GOK, Economic Review, 1999. P. S.35.

5.3 Female Agricultural Labourers - A Taluk Wise Analysis

The taluk-wise figures indicate that 32 out of 58 taluks in different districts of Kerala have a higher percentage of agricultural labourers than the state average. Among these taluks, the major rice growing regions of Palakkad district are included. Chittur taluk of Palakkad district has the largest female participation rate as labourers with 29.76 per cent, followed by Devicolam (29.63), Perumade (27.66), Alathur (27.46), Vythiri (22.33),

Kuttanad (21.25), Shertallai (21.23) and Palakkad taluk (20.62).

At present, Palakkad district consists of two revenue divisions, namely Palakkad and Ottapalam. Palakkad, Alathur and Chittur taluks form the Palakkad revenue division. The paddy cultivation in Palakkad district is mainly concentrated in these taluks. The study of the economic activities of female agricultural labourers is significant and important in order to analyse the socio-economic development of this district of Kerala.

5.3.1 Alathur Taluk

The Census Report shows the total and rural wise distribution of main female workers in Alathur taluk. The report also shows that its major part of workers was engaged in agriculture as labourers. The total number of workers in this taluk is 143742, among them, 71390 are agricultural labourers. The total number of rural female workers is 54167. Out of this 41812 are agricultural labourers. Alathur is the only taluk in the district without urban population. The Table (5.2) shows the distribution of main workers in Alathur Taluk.

Table 5.2 Distribution of Main Workers in Alathur Taluk –
1991

Total Rural Urban	Person (P) Male(M) Female (F)	Total	Cultivat ors	Agricult ural Laboure rs	House hold industri al workers	Other workers
Total	P	143742 (100.0)	17713 (12.32)	71390 (49.67)	6538 (4.55)	48101 (33.46)
	M	89575 (100.0)	13977 (15.6)	29578 (33.02)	4510 (5.03)	41510 (46.34)
	F	54167 (100.0)	3736 (6.90)	41812 (77.19)	2028 (3.74)	6591 (12.17)
Rural	P	143742 (100.0)	17713 (12.32)	71390 (49.67)	6538 (4.55)	48101 (33.46)
	M	89575 (100.0)	13977 (15.6)	29578 (33.02)	4510 (5.03)	41510 (46.34)
	F	54167 (100.0)	3736 (6.9)	41812 (77.19)	2028 (3.74)	6591 (12.17)
Urban	P	-	-	-	-	-
	M	-	-	-	-	-
	F	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of workers to total workers.

Source: Census of India, series 12, Kerala Paper 2 of 1991.

5.3.2 The Profile of Sample Areas in Alathur Taluk

Kizhakkencherry: Alathur taluk consists of two development blocks and 16 panchayats. The first block, Alathur is situated in the south central part of the district.

It covers an area of 312 sq.kms. The total population as per 1991 census is 261385. Paddy is, by far, the most important crop. Canals irrigate a net area of 7470 hectares. Kizhakkencherry, the sample area is situated in Alathur block. It covers an area of 112.56 sq.kms. The total population is 36215, of which the female population is 18294. According to the 1991 census, total scheduled caste population is 5873, among them 2853, were males. The literacy rate of the females (72.78 per cent) is lower than males (87.37per cent). Paddy is the most important crop in this area.

Thenkurissi: The second block of Alathur taluk is Kuzhalmannam, covers an area of 315 sq.kms. it contains 17 villages and eight panchayats. It has a population of 215751. Paddy is the most important crop covering a gross area of 21500 hectares. The main source of irrigation is canals and it accounts for 27600 hectares. Thenkurissi panchayat has an area of 29.92 sq.kms and it is situated in Kuzhalmannam block. It has a population of 25307 of them 13046 are females. The scheduled caste population of the panchayat according to 1991 census is 7036, of which, the female scheduled caste population is 3602. The literacy rate of males is 84.66 per cent and females literacy rate is 67.27 per cent. The population primarily depends on agriculture

for livelihood. The Table (5.3) shows the distribution of main workers in the sample areas of Alathur taluk of Palakkad district. The female labourers who are engaged in agriculture are higher than that of male labourers.

Table 5.3 Profile of Sample Areas of Alathur and Kuhzhalmannam Blocks of Alathur Taluk.

Categories	Male (M) Female(F) Total(T)	Kizhakkencherry	Thenkurissi
Population	M	17921	12261
	F	18294	13046
	T	36215	25307
Work participation Rate	M	51.10	50.11
	F	30.85	32.70
	T	40.87	41.18
Total Workers	M	9157	6144
	F	5644	4266
	T	14801	10410
Cultivators	M	1990	685
	F	336	159
	T	2326	844
Agricultural Labourers	M	3431	1815
	F	3949	2999
	T	7380	4814
Literacy Rate	M	87.37	84.66
	F	72.78	67.27
	T	79.94	77.49

Source: GOK, Panchayat level statistics, Palakkad district, 1996

5.3.3 Chittur Taluk

Chittur taluk holds an important place in Palakkad, when we analyse the agriculture sector of this

district. Most of the persons, especially the females in rural and urban areas are engaged in agriculture sector as labourers. The number of total workers is 163185, among whom 83655 are engaged as agriculture labourers. The total number of female agricultural labourers is 46533. The rural and urban wise distribution also shows a high proportion of females in agriculture as labourers. Out of 55406 rural female workers, 43083 are female agricultural labourers. In urban areas the total female workers' number is 6080, among which 3450 are agricultural labourers. The Table (5.4) shows the distribution of main workers in Chittur Taluk.

Table 5.4 Distribution of Main Workers in Chittur Taluk 1991

Total Rural Urban	Person (p) Male(M) Female (F)	Total	Cultiva- tors	Agricultur- al Labourers	House hold industrial workers	Other workers
Total	P	163185 (100.0)	20011 (12.26)	83655 (51.26)	6372 (3.90)	53147 (32.57)
	M	101699 (100.0)	15649 (15.39)	37122 (36.50)	4383 (4.31)	44545 (43.80)
	F	61486 (100.0)	4362 (7.09)	46533 (75.68)	1989 (3.23)	8602 (13.99)
Rural	P	141763 (100.0)	18892 (13.33)	77922 (54.97)	4061 (2.86)	40888 (28.84)
	M	86357 (100.0)	14731 (17.06)	34839 (40.34)	2865 (3.32)	33922 (39.28)
	F	55406 (100.0)	4161 (7.51)	43083 (77.76)	1196 (2.16)	6966 (12.57)
Urban	P	21422 (100.0)	1119 (5.22)	5733 (26.76)	2311 (10.79)	12259 (57.23)
	M	15342 (100.0)	918 (5.98)	2283 (14.88)	1518 (9.89)	10623 (69.24)
	F	6080 (100.0)	201 (3.30)	3450 (56.74)	793 (13.04)	1636 (26.91)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of workers to total workers

Source: Census of India, Series 12, Kerala paper 2 of 1991.

5.3.4 Profile of Sample Areas of Chittur Taluk

Nallepally: Chittur taluk consists of three development blocks and 16 panchayats. Chittur block of Chittur taluk has an areas of 290 sq.kms and is situated in the south of the district. It has 19 villages, six panchayaths and one town. The population stands at 181869. The density of population is above 560. About 75 per cent of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Industry employs less than eight per cent and the remaining find their employment in the tertiary sector. The block has a geographical area of 29000 hectares. It is endowed with good irrigation facility from the Chitturpuzha project. Nallepally panchayath covers an area of 39.7 sq.kms and has a population of 30032. The female population (15498) is higher than the male population (14534). The literacy level of females is 60.81 per cent, which is lower than that of males (77.38per cent). The scheduled caste population of this panchayat, according to the 1991 census is 4960 among them 2528 are females. Most of the workers are employed in the primary sector.

Table 5.5 Profile of Sample Areas of Chittur and Kollengode blocks of Chittur Taluk

Categories	Male (M) Female(F) Total(T)	Nallepally	Muthalamada
Population	M	14534	16957
	F	15498	16978
	T	30032	33935
Work participation Rate	M	46.02	58.11
	F	36.39	37.35
	T	45.89	47.72
Total Workers	M	8142	9854
	F	5640	6341
	T	13782	16195
Cultivators	M	1329	1862
	F	376	540
	T	1705	2402
Agricultural Labourers	M	3548	4197
	F	4384	4279
	T	7932	8476
Literacy Rate	M	77.38	70.35
	F	60.81	54.73
	T	68.96	62.52

Source: GOK, Panchayat level statistics, Palakkad district, 1996.

Muthalamada: Kollengode block of Chittur taluk, located in the south central part of the district of Palakkad, covers an area of 3283 sq.kms with 13 village, constituting of five village panchayats. The total population is 209849. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood and employment

for the majority. Paddy is the main crop, followed by groundnut and coconut. Of the cropped area, 10725 hectares are irrigated. Canals account for 7200 hectares, tanks 2600 hectares and other sources of irrigation 425 hectares. Nearly 70 per cent of the workers are engaged in the primary sector, where as the secondary sector accounts for 15 per cent. Dairying is a significant subsidiary occupation. Muthalamada panchayath covers an area of 66.76 sq.kms. The population is 33935, among them 16978 are females and 16957 are males. The scheduled caste population as per 1991 census is 5902. The female scheduled caste population (3001) is higher than that of male population (2901). In the case of the literacy level, the male literacy rate (70.35) is higher than the females (54.73). The Table (5.5) reveals the profile of the sample areas of Chittur taluk of Palakkad district.

5.3.5 Palakkad Taluk

Palakkad Taluk consists of one municipality and two Community Development Blocks. The main economic activity of the people is related to the agriculture sector. The total number of workers in this taluk is 174647 among them 63884 are agricultural labourers. The rural and urban wise distribution of the workers is also shows a high proportion

of agricultural labourers, among them the female agricultural labourers holds a prominent place. Their number is 30010 in rural areas and 4492 in urban areas. The Table (5.6) shows the distribution of main workers in Palakkad taluk of Palakkad district.

Table 5.6 Distribution of Main Workers in Palakkad Taluk
- 1991

Total Rural Urban	Person (p) Male(M) Female (F)	Total	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	House hold industrial workers	Other workers
Total	P	174647 (100.0)	15777 (9.03)	63884 (36.58)	7654 (4.38)	87332 (50.00)
	M	121807 (100.0)	12048 (9.89)	29382 (24.12)	5739 (4.71)	74638 (61.28)
	F	52840 (100.0)	3729 (7.06)	34502 (65.30)	1915 (3.62)	12694 (24.02)
Rural	P	120409 (100.0)	14130 (11.74)	55805 (46.35)	5589 (4.64)	44885 (37.28)
	M	79689 (100.0)	10739 (13.48)	25795 (32.37)	4023 (5.05)	39132 (49.10)
	F	40720 (100.0)	3391 (8.32)	30010 (73.70)	1566 (3.85)	5753 (14.13)
Urban	P	54238 (100.0)	1647 (3.04)	8079 (14.90)	2065 (3.81)	42447 (78.26)
	M	42118 (100.0)	1309 (3.11)	3587 (8.52)	1716 (4.09)	35506 (84.30)
	F	12120 (100.0)	338 (2.79)	4492 (37.06)	349 (2.88)	6941 (59.27)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of workers to total workers

Source: Census of India, Series 12, Kerala paper 2 of 1991.

5.3.6 Profile of Sample Areas of Palakkad Taluk

Elappuly: Palakkad taluk consists of two development blocks and 17 panchayaths. The newly created

Malampuzha block is carved out of Kozhalmannam, Palakkad and Kollengode blocks. It comprises of eight panchayats and has a population of 168358. Most of the people are agricultural labourers. Paddy is the major crop of the block, which sustains the majority of the people. Elappuly panchayat belongs to Malampuzha block and has an area of 49.01 sq.kms. This is inhabited by 35509 persons, of them 18078 are women. Agriculture sector continues to be the main source of employment and income. The total scheduled caste population as per 1991 census is 5664 among them 2859 are females. The literacy rate of females (64.8 per cent) is lower than the males (82.79 per cent)

Parali: Palakkad ranks second only to Attappady in area and covers 723 sq.kms. Palakkad block, with two towns, 20 villages and constituting 12 panchayats, has a population of 387911. The density of population is 472 sq.kms. Economic activities are sustained by a labour force, which forms 34 per cent of the population. Agriculture occupies the foremost position in providing employment and as a source of livelihood. The net area sown is 17200 hectares, where as forests cover 4500 hectares and cultivable land (waste) 7500 hectares. Paddy occupies the foremost place in the terms of cropped area, accounting for 11,219 acres. Parli covers an area of 30.27

sq.kms. This situated in Palakkad block, has a population of 29640 of which, 14525 are males and 15115 are females. The scheduled caste population is 6273. The number of female population is 3189 and male population is 3084. Agriculture occupies an important position in providing employment and income to the people.

Table 5.7 Profile of Sample Areas of Malampuzha and Palakkad Blocks of Palakkad Taluk

Categories	Male (M) Female(F) Total(T)	Elappully	Parli
Population	M	17431	14525
	F	18078	15115
	T	35509	29640
Work participation Rate	M	53.69	47.07
	F	31.03	24.05
	T	42.15	35.33
Total Workers	M	9359	6837
	F	5609	3635
	T	14968	10472
Cultivators	M	1369	798
	F	361	267
	T	1730	1065
Agricultural Labourers	M	3622	1963
	F	3937	2388
	T	7559	4351
Literacy Rate	M	82.79	88.17
	F	64.81	73.72
	T	73.62	80.76

Source: GOK, Panchayat level statistics, Palakkad district, 1996.

5.4 Socio-Economic Condition of Sample Female Agricultural Labourers

The level of socio-economic conditions of women in any society indicates their level of status. The female

agricultural wage earners are recognized to be perhaps the most vulnerable and deprived section of the rural population. With a meagre asset base and high dependence on their own labour power for earning a livelihood, agricultural labourers have fragile exchange entitlements. Given their weak collective and bargaining strength, they are often exploited by other socio-economic classes. In a heterogeneous and complex society, the position, dependence and disabilities of workers stem from their occupational immobility (GOI, 1974).

The level of oppression and exploitation of working class can generally measure the level of exploitation of women in a society in general in the society. The orientation of a society as a whole regarding the desirability that women should play an equal role in country's development was taken as a very important precondition for the advancement not only women but the country as a whole. The changes in the age of marriage, size of family, level of literacy, health status, standard of living are important indicators which have to be recognized and analysed in order to understand the present status of women in general and female agricultural labourers in particular. Before analyzing the socio-economic situation of the female labourers in the agricultural sector, the back

ground data of the women taken in samples has been given to highlight the general trends noticed with regard to such aspects as their age, caste, education, assets, marital status, size of the family, income, consumption pattern, indebtedness and saving pattern.

5.4.1 Age Composition

The agricultural labourers generally come into their career at an early age and this is true in the case of all the female agricultural labourers selected for the study. The age composition of the respondents of the sample area is presented in the Table (5.8).

From the table, we find that sample comprises majority of the female agricultural labourers in the age groups of 41-50 years. In all the three taluks, above 32 per cent of the respondents are in the age group of 41-50 years, dominate the entire sample. In the age group of 51-60 years, Chittur taluk constitute the highest in number. However, in the age group of 20-30 years, constitute 18.33 per cent in the total sample, among them, Alathur taluk holds the highest number in the sample female agricultural labourers.

Table 5.8 Age Composition of the Respondents

Age category	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
20 – 30	24 (43.64)	16 (29.09)	15 (21.27)	55	18.33
31 – 40	27 (30.68)	27 (30.68)	34 (38.64)	88	29.34
41 – 50	32 (31.38)	35 (34.31)	35 (34.31)	102	34.00
51 – 60	17 (30.91)	22 (40.00)	16 (29.09)	55	18.33

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of respondents to total of each category

5.4.2 Family Composition and Size of the Family

Data collection on family type in all the three taluks showed that most of the respondents have nuclear extended families. The importance of joint family among the sample households is insignificant. Only 3.33 per cent respondents reported the existence of joint family in their households. The Table (5.9) shows the size of the family of the sample female agricultural labourers.

The data collected on the family size in all the three taluks of Palakkad district showed that 62.33 per cent of the respondents have 4-6 members in their family. The

table shows that the average family size in the sample area of the study is about 5.44 members. Only five families have the family size of 10 and above members. Similarly, 23.67 per cent of the families belonged to the family size between seven and nine members.

Table (5.9) Size of the Family

Family Size	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
1 - 3	16 (43.24)	15 (40.54)	6 (16.22)	37	12.33
4- 6	63 (33.69)	59 (31.55)	65 (34.76)	187	62.33
7 - 9	19 (26.76)	25 (35.21)	27 (38.03)	71	23.67
10 - 12	2 (40.00)	1 (20.00)	2 (40.00)	5	1.67

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of respondents to total of each category

5.4.3 Population Particulars

The demographic particulars of the sample female agricultural labourers present the nature and extent of development among the rural female labourers. The family members of the sample households depend on the income earned by the female agricultural labourers. The per

capita income for consumption is also depends upon the total number of the population of the sample households. The Table (5.10) shows the population composition of the sample households.

Table 5.10 Composition of Sex wise Population in Sample Respondents' Families

Taluk	Total	Male	Female	School going children	
				Male	Female
Alathur	529	233	296	92	96
Chittur	527	227	300	98	100
Palakkad	589	260	329	100	120
Total	1645	720	925	290	316

The total population of the sample households is 1645. There are 720 males and 925 females. The number of the females is higher than the males in all the taluks of Palakkad district. The total number of population in Palakkad taluk is higher than that of other two taluks. Of the total population, 290 male children and 316 female children is school going children. Females contribute more than half of the population.

5.4.4 Marital Status

Marriage is an important factor that brings change in the lives of men and women whether they are rich

or poor. The Table (5.11) shows the particulars of the marital status of the female agricultural labourers. It is evident from the table that 98 per cent of the female agricultural labourers in the total sample are married. Among the sample respondents, a large number of scheduled caste female labourers are married. Among the married women, 18.67 per cent are widows and 1.33 per cent is divorced. Only two per cent of female agricultural labourers are unmarried.

Table 5.11 Marital Status of the Respondents

Taluk	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced
Alathur	1	83	14	2
Chittur	3	75	20	2
Palakkad	2	76	22	-
Total	6	234	56	4
Percentage	2.0	78.0	18.67	1.33

Age at Marriage

Among the married female agricultural labourers, most of them got married at the age of 18 and 21. At the same time, 3.33 per cent of the respondents got married at the age of 22 and above. 41.67 per cent of them are got married at the age of 17 and less than 17. The same

trend also can be seen the case of taluk wise study of age at marriage. The Table (5.12) shows the particulars of age at marriage of the respondents.

With regard to marriage relations, 11.67 per cent of respondents opined that it is good when marriage is on the basis of own decisions. At the same time, 88.33 per cent of the respondents agreed with the decision of family members and relatives in the marriage relations. There is less chance for inter caste marriages in their society.

Table 5.12 Age at Marriage

Age	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad	Total	Percent age
Less than 17	38 (30.4)	45 (36.0)	42 (33.6)	125	41.67
18 - 21	58 (36.48)	49 (30.82)	52 (32.70)	159	53.00
22 and above	3 (30.0)	3 (30.0)	4 (40.0)	10	3.33

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of respondents to total of each category

Dowry System

The practice of dowry taking has spread like an epidemic even among the poor agricultural labour

household families. It is significant to note that 65 per cent of the female respondents opined that the dowry practice is severe and rest of the respondents admitted the fact that there is an increasing trend in the practice of dowry system. The dowry system also hits hard at the farm labourers. Most of the labourers say that dowry is a necessary evil. They are afraid of the dowry to be given at the time of marriage of their daughters and that is why they consider their daughters as a liability and hence they do not welcome the birth of a female baby. From the opinion of the female respondents, it can be concluded that the prevalence of this evil practice is also even among the backward agricultural labour households whose meagre earnings are hardly adequate to meet the minimum daily necessities. They revealed that the dowry is given in a variety of ways depending upon the traditions and customs of their community.

5.4.5 Caste Composition of the Sample Female Agricultural Labourers

The social condition of a person is related to economic status. Palakkad is witnessing the growing trend of the feminisation in the agricultural labour force. The status of female agricultural labourers is related to the problems confronted by these labourers. The characteristics

of the economy of Palakkad district and the problems of the female agricultural labourers indicate their low status in the society. To many, their social backwardness is entirely as a result of their economic backwardness and caste system.

A man's caste has played a significant role in determining his dignity, position and status in the society. Palakkad, one of the granaries of Kerala, have a large concentration of female agricultural labourers. These labourers drawn mainly from the socially backward groups (Buchanan, 1807) are not only subjected to economic backwardness but have considerable difficulties in the society due to their caste disabilities. These socially disadvantaged labourers are the victims of the social discrimination, low wages, poor housing conditions, lack of education, options and opportunities. The agrarian sector provides employment to these women and since it is basically an unorganised sector, the nature of exploitation of women in this sector is both acute and wide spread.

In scheduled caste community, women have been working for centuries. There is a close relationship between the caste and the work especially in traditional occupation like agriculture as labourers. Their condition is far from satisfactory. This reveals that with the overall category of

agricultural labourers, scheduled caste women do occupy a subordinate position in Palakkad. The condition and status enjoyed by this section of workers as a person, family member and a member of society is low. But there is a fact that scheduled caste female agricultural labourers constitute a significant proportion in the total agricultural labour force in Palakkad agriculture sector. It is noticed from Table (5.14) that female labour is prevalent in the sample areas and more so among the scheduled caste households. As many as 76 per cent of the labourers are drawn from scheduled caste households and they are followed by Hindu Ezhava (21 per cent). The participation of Muslim (2 per cent) and Christian (1 per cent) female labourers in agriculture is insignificant. This confirms the view that labourers are also engaged in work to eke out their livelihood in all the sample village and especially labourers from the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy.

5.4.6 Educational Status

Educational has contributed significantly to raise the status of women in the family and that educated women has more status in the society. The socio-economic position is measured through the level of education, occupation and income. It was realized that women's

education is a necessary pre-condition for women's improved position and status in the society. Rural women, the majority of whom are illiterate or have low level of education.

Even though there is a sharp increase in women's literacy level in most of the districts of Kerala, Palakkad shows a relatively less educational status. The important fact for this is that the majority of them are poor. Women's participation on social front could be assessed mainly in terms of improvement in literacy level. In Malabar, the progress of education was stalled by an oppressive system of land relations, poverty and misery to which the large body of tenants and agricultural labourers are subjected. Women in particular and more specifically, rural poor and illiterate women never get portrayed as agents of change and whose dismal plight is already well known.

The literacy rate among the female agricultural labourers is not high. Table (5.13) indicates that among the sample female agricultural labourer respondents, about 32 per cent are illiterates who never attended any school during their lifetime. About 47.33 per cent of the respondents can be claimed as literates as they attended

schools at least for primary education. The rest of the respondents attended in middle and high schools. It is significant to note that female agricultural labour and education have a close relation and the majority of the respondents who hail from the scheduled castes are deprived of the fruits of education as they went into service in their very early age.

Table 5.13 Caste and Educational Status

Caste	Level of Education					Total
	Illiterate	Primary	Middle	High School	SSLC & Above	
Hindu Ezhava	10 (10.42)	8 (5.63)	45 (78.95)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	63 (21.0)
Scheduled Castes	86 (89.58)	134 (94.37)	8 (14.04)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	228 (76.0)
Christian	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.75)	2 (40.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.0)
Muslim	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (5.26)	3 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (2.0)
Total	96 (32.0)	142 (47.33)	57 (19.0)	5 (1.67)	0 (0.0)	300 (100.0)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of respondent to total of each category

$\chi^2 = 164.5$, Table value of χ^2 at 5 per cent level of significance is 21. Here we reject hypothesis, that is the level of education and caste are independent. The value of χ^2 is greater than the table value. So the level of education

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Muslim	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (5.26)	3 (60.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (2.0)
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of sample female agricultural labourers and their caste have a close relationship and they are dependent with each other.

Another important fact to be noted here is that there are four important reasons for their illiteracy and low level of education. Most of the respondents (50 per cent) opined that due to their economic problems, they did not get proper education. 18 per cent of the respondents say that they did not feel the importance of education at that time and 12 per cent of them revealed the fact that education is not necessary for their occupation. Rest of the respondents (20 per cent) says that they are compelled to stay at home instead of going to school to look after household work and younger ones.

5.4.7 Educational Status of Female Agricultural Labourers in India and Kerala - A Comparative Study

While considering the educational status of the sample female labour respondents, it is significant to analyse and compare the educational status of female agricultural labourers in India and Kerala, who are mainly drawn from the scheduled castes and poor sections of the society. Agricultural labourers are by and large illiterate. A

small section of the population of agricultural labourers has been persuaded in the educational process. Household work and compulsion to supplement family income and poverty that discourage the agricultural labour households in sending their children to schools. Poverty is more closely attached to rural areas and weaker sections of the society.

Agricultural labourers are characterized by a low level of education in the Ladak region of Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Western Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Eastern Uttar Pradesh and parts of Bihar and Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, pockets of districts with high level of education are to be found in Punjab, Western Uttar Pradesh, deltaic West Bengal, coastal Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. The rural women are found at the lowest stratum. The overall situation is formidable, a number of districts in Punjab, the coastal region of Karnataka and Kerala show a slight improvement (Aijazuddin and Nuna, 1990).

In India and Kerala, most of the female agricultural labourers are from socially backward groups. Their educational condition is lower than compared to the general women. The socio-economic status is related to

their education and employment. The Table (5.14) shows the distribution of scheduled caste female agricultural labourers and literates in India and Kerala.

Table 5.14 Distribution of total female scheduled caste Agricultural Labourers and Literates in India and Kerala (1991).

Total Rural Urban	Agricultural Labourers		Literates	
	Persons	Females	Persons	Females
INDIA*				
Total	24470657 (100.0)	8839053 (36.12)	41562427 (100.0)	12615880 (30.35)
Rural	23282214 (100.0)	8457618 (36.32)	29918798 (100.0)	8392263 (28.05)
Urban	1188443 (100.0)	381435 (28.73)	11643629 (100.0)	4223617 (36.27)
KERALA**				
Total	571693 (100.0)	234567 (41.03)	2002786 (100.0)	951948 (47.53)
Rural	512913 (100.0)	212200 (41.37)	1506230 (100.0)	761237 (47.39)
Urban	58780 (100.0)	22367 (38.05)	396556 (100.0)	190711 (48.09)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage to total agricultural labourers and literates

Source: * Census of India, 1991 series 1, paper I of 1993

** Census of India, Union Primary census abstract for scheduled castes, 1991.

5.4.8 Occupation of the Husbands of the Respondents

The Table (5.15) shows the particulars of occupation of the husbands of the respondents. The husbands or the female agricultural labourers are engaged in manual work of the other to earn their livelihood. Most of them are engaged in daily wage labour. It is observed that 71.79 per cent of them settled as agricultural labourers like their wives. 6.41 per cent of them cultivate their tiny bits of land, while only 14.96 per cent of their husbands are working in construction and related activities. About 3.42 per cent of them are engaged in tailoring and rest of them are not doing anything. None of them are in the government service. Though the members of a family work and earn, their total income is considerably meagre and low.

Table 5.15 Occupational status of the husband of the respondents

Occupation	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Agricultural Labourers	50 (29.76)	60 (35.71)	58 (34.53)	168	71.79
Construction	20 (57.14)	5 (14.29)	10 (28.57)	35	14.96
Cultivation	8 (53.33)	5 (33.33)	2 (13.34)	15	6.41
Tailoring	3 (37.5)	2 (25.0)	3 (37.5)	8	3.42
Not doing anything	2 (25.0)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	8	3.42

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of respondents to total of each category

5.4.9 Income Pattern of the Respondents

The income through the employment is the major source of earning for the majority of the people. The annual income of the female agricultural labourers is basically derived from wage income. The contribution of female agricultural labourers to their family income is not only significant but is of great value to their families and they spend their entire income to increase the standard of living and welfare of the family members. They contribute their part with other sources to protect their family's real income.

Wage trend is the good index of income and standard of living of the workers. Compared to other districts of Kerala state, Palakkad records a low wage rate in agriculture sector. Women agricultural labourers concentrated in low income groups. As a result, rural households have often faced with impoverishment and difficulty in meeting their basic needs. However, the less economic resources and their labour are essential for supporting their families.

The area under study reveals that the female participation in agriculture as labourers in the total working force was found to be higher than the male workers.

However, this does not mean that females' contribution towards total income is higher. Palakkad is an agricultural region and backward district in Kerala, which shows the nature and condition of the workers. So economically and socially these workers have occupied the lowest grade in the working group. Income, therefore, constitutes one of the main determinants of the status of women in the household and in the society.

The most vulnerable section of agricultural sector is the women workers. As a labourer they are exploited and deprived section of the community. They are poor because of lack of employment in agriculture sector, lack of opportunities for self or non-agricultural employment and they get low wages for their work. For a considerable part of the year, they are out of work and earn nothing. At the same time, they are employed they earn meager income. Inadequate land holding in an agrarian economy brings inadequate income, which creates a negative impact on consumption and economic status.

The contribution of female labourers is crucial for family survival, even in households where there are working males. The improvements in the level of income of agricultural labourers also significantly contributed for

overall improvement of the life style of the members. For the present analysis of agricultural wage income pattern of the female agricultural labourers, the monthly average number of man days and agricultural wages are taken into consideration. Accordingly, their income is calculated on month-wise. The Table (5.16) gives us the monthly average wage income pattern of the respondents.

Table 5.16 Distribution of Agricultural Wage Income among the Respondents

Wage income (in rupees)	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Less than 300	20 (24.39)	30 (36.59)	32 (39.02)	38	27.33
301 - 350	50 (30.86)	60 (37.04)	52 (32.10)	162	54.0
351 - 400	15 (50.0)	6 (20.0)	9 (30.0)	30	10.0
401 - 450	11 (52.38)	4 (19.05)	6 (28.57)	21	7.0
451 and above	4 (80.0)	- (0.0)	1 (20.0)	5	1.67
Total	100	100	100	300	100.00

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of respondents to total of each category

The income of the female agricultural labourers is significantly low. 54 per cent of female labourers falls in the income category of Rs.301 to Rs.350 and only 18.67 per

cent of the female workers earn Rs.351 and above Rs. 451 per month. And the rest of the respondents (27.33 per cent) fall in the group less than Rs. 300. Lack of assets and the size of the families force the females to work and contribute towards family income. This shows the pathetic economic situation of the agricultural labour class.

The existing wage rate and decline in the days of work has reduced their income to a very low level. The income, which is earned by the labourers is not adequate enough to support their families even for bare subsistence. The prosperity in agriculture has brought enormous benefit to few big landlords while the lot of rural workers in this prosperity has been only marginal. Responsibility of managing on a very low income falls on women. The object of poverty, which is largely the consequence of a meagre income level, haunts every sphere of their living. This can be quantified in terms of low consumption expenditure and pattern of expenditure. The Table (5.17) gives the particulars of income made through all the sources. Apart from the meagre income from agricultural wages, the female labourers forced to engaged in other works like construction works, domestic servants and collecting fuels and from animal husbandry. Thus the total income of female agricultural labourers is comprised of the wages and income from other sources.

Table 5.17 Total Average Monthly Income of the Respondents

Income (in rupees)	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Less than 400	4 (33.33)	2 (16.67)	6 (50.0)	12	4.00
401 - 500	25 (29.41)	32 (37.65)	28 (32.94)	85	28.33
501 - 600	43 (26.71)	56 (34.78)	62 (38.51)	161	53.67
601 - 700	25 (64.10)	10 (25.64)	4 (10.26)	39	13.00
701 and above	3 (100.0)	- (0.0)	- (0.0)	3	1.00
Total	100	100	100	300	100.00

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage of total of each category.

It is evident from the table that the majority of the sample respondents' (53.67) income falls between Rs. 501-600 per month. This is followed by 28.33 per cent of the respondents whose total monthly income ranges between Rs. 401 and 500. The monthly income of about 13 per cent of the female agricultural labourers falls between Rs. 601 and 700 and four per cent of them earn less than Rs.400. Only one per cent of the respondents earn a higher income of Rs. 701 and above per month. Some respondents

do not take interest to find out some other works and they still continue as agricultural labourers itself. At the same time, most of the agricultural labourers are trying to get employment other than agricultural labour. More than 50 per cent of the respondents earn more income from other sources than agricultural wages.

The family income is the true index to assess the standard of living of the workers. The total family income of the agricultural labour households is very of low and inadequate to meet their minimum needs. The average monthly family income of the labour households is given in Table (5.18).

Table 5.18 Average monthly Family income of the Respondents (in rupees)

Income category	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Less than 600	12	17	16	45	15.00
601 - 1000	30	28	27	85	28.33
1001 - 1400	21	24	25	70	23.33
1041 - 1500	17	16	17	50	16.67
1801 and above	20	15	15	50	16.67
Total	100	100	100	300	100.00

It is significant to note that 16.67 per cent of them falls in the income category of Rs. 1801 and above. 28.33 per cent of the sample respondents' family income falls between Rs.601-1000 per month. As a whole 83.33 per cent of the respondents' family income is low, which is less than Rs.1800 per month.

5.4.10 Consumption Expenditure Pattern of Sample Agricultural Labour Households

The economic development of a society cannot only be measured through the technical and materialistic improvements, but through the increase in the standard of living of the people. The growth of a region depends on its capacity to raise the lot of the poorest and weakest section of its society. The capacity of a family to consume the goods and services greatly depends upon the occupation and source of revenue and expenses on other items such as housing, health, clothing and expenses on children's schooling.

The level of living and diet depends upon the income. Inadequate income that inevitably has a negative impact on consumption and nutritional standards of the people. Income, therefore, constitutes one of the most

important determinants of the standard of living and nutritional status of a household. Female agricultural labourers meagre income is used for the welfare of the household. The resources targeted at women are benefited to the whole family. Men spend a significant portion on personal goods but poor women use their meagre income mostly on family needs.

5.4.10.1 Structure of Consumption Expenditure

There are considerable disparities in the level of expenditure among the different groups in a society. The size of distributed income is inadequate to the lowest income groups especially to the agricultural labourers and inequalities are existing in expenditure pattern in the society. The female agricultural labourers and their family is in a situation of great poverty, the level of annual income influences the quality and quantity of food.

There are many factors that influence the food habits of the local society. They are the soil fertility, rainfall, density of population and commercialization of agricultural products. Apart from these, the socio-economic and cultural factors such as the economic position of the household, size of family, health conditions, local customs

and beliefs are also concerned with regard to the type of food that is taken to consume. The agricultural labourers are the worst affected by the effects of rise in prices, because of meagre earnings by way of wages. The cost of living is higher than their economic resources. Due to this, the household income and consumption expenditure of an average agricultural labour household is precariously balanced, and that too when it finds some additional work. Otherwise most of them are in debt. The Table (5.19) shows the distribution of total income of female agricultural labourers on different items of the households. Out of total income, 63 to 70 per cent of their income is spent on food and related items. The remaining meagre portion of the income distributed on fuel and lighting, education, clothing, medicine and on festivals and ceremonies.

Table 5.19 Distribution of Income on Different Items

Items	Taluk	Percentage distribution of total income on items				
		63 %	66 %	69 %	70 %	Total
Food	Alathur	20 (29.41)	32 (32.99)	33 (35.11)	15 (36.58)	100
	Chittur	23 (33.82)	35 (36.08)	30 (31.91)	12 (29.27)	100
	Palakkad	25 (36.77)	30 (30.93)	31 (32.98)	14 (34.15)	100
	Total	68	97	94	41	300
	Percent age	22.67	32.33	31.33	13.67	100.0

Fuel and Light	Taluk	6 per cent	7 per cent	5per cent	3per cent	Total
	Alathur	30 (38.96)	36 (34.29)	24 (28.58)	10 (29.41)	100
	Chittur	22 (28.57)	35 (33.33)	30 (35.71)	13 (38.24)	100
	Palakkad	25 (32.47)	34 (32.38)	30 (35.71)	11 (32.35)	100
	Total	77	105	84	34	300
	Percent age	25.67	35.0	28.0	11.33	100.0
Clot hing	Taluk	7 %	6 %	8 %	9 %	Total
	Alathur	28 (34.57)	30 (31.25)	30 (34.09)	12 (34.29)	100
	Chittur	28 (34.57)	35 (36.46)	28 (31.82)	9 (25.71)	100
	Palakkad	25 (30.86)	31 (32.29)	30 (34.09)	14 (40.00)	100
	Total	81	96	88	35	300
	Percent age	27.0	32.0	29.33	11.67	100.0
Educa tion	Taluk	4 %	5 %	3 %	6 %	Total
	Alathur	25 (34.72)	30 (28.85)	20 (33.90)	25 (38.46)	100
	Chittur	24 (33.33)	36 (34.62)	20 (33.90)	20 (30.77)	100
	Palakkad	23 (31.95)	38 (36.53)	19 (32.20)	20 (30.77)	100
	Total	72	104	59	65	300
	Percent age	24.0	34.67	19.67	21.66	100.0

Services	Taluk	3 %	2 %	4 %	5 %	Total
	Alathur	32 (35.55)	35 (33.98)	30 (36.14)	3 (12.50)	100
	Chittur	28 (31.11)	32 (31.07)	25 (30.12)	15 (62.50)	100
	Palakkad	30 (30.34)	36 (34.95)	28 (33.74)	6 (25.00)	100
	Total	90	103	83	24	300
	Percent age	30.00	34.33	27.67	8.0	100.0
Medicine and others	Taluk	12 %	10 %	8 %	5 %	Total
	Alathur	25 (34.72)	30 (28.85)	20 (33.90)	25 (38.46)	100
	Chittur	24 (33.33)	36 (34.62)	20 (33.90)	20 (30.77)	100
	Palakkad	23 (31.95)	38 (36.53)	19 (32.20)	20 (30.77)	100
	Total	72	104	59	65	300
	Percent age	24.0	34.67	19.67	21.66	100.0
Miscellaneous**	Taluk	5 %	4 %	3 %	2%	Total
	Alathur	20 (31.75)	30 (30.61)	32 (33.68)	18 (40.91)	100
	Chittur	21 (33.33)	36 (36.73)	33 (34.74)	10 (22.73)	1000
	Palakkad	22 (34.92)	32 (32.66)	30 (31.58)	16 (36.36)	100
	Total	63	98	95	44	300
	Percent age	21.00	32.67	31.67	14.66	100.0

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage to total of each category

** In Miscellaneous item, includes the festivals and ceremonies

5.4.10.2 *Expenditure on different items in sample areas*

Food

Rice is the staple food of the majority of the sample agricultural labour households. Even a small rise in the price will affect the living standard of these workers. The major items which they purchase for daily consumption including rice, oil and vegetables. As rice is the main food, a major portion of their wages and the other income is spent on rice alone. As a result, they are left with only little money to purchase other food items. This is mainly due to the lack of employment and meagre earnings of the family. Generally the level of expenditure depends upon the level of income. It is observed that adequate intake of calories was not possible in these families. They spent the major part of the income on purchase of food items that is 63 to 70 per cent of their total income, of which 60 per cent is spent on rice alone.

Further, in this study, it is very much significance to take into account even the smaller amounts spent by the sample household in order to assess their economic position and arrive at an opinion. Hence, the expenditure incurred by the families on various items is also discussed in detail.

The mode of consumption of nutritional food among the sample agricultural labour households is evident from the Table (5.20). It is significant to note that their consumption pattern is far from satisfactory. The qualitative as well as quantitative intake is usually very low and cheap. The small income of the households did not allow them to take special food items like milk, egg, meat and fruits in their diet. Among food materials, rice is the most important item of expenditure, which indicates the low level of living, poverty and low nutritional status of the agricultural labour households. The following table gives the consumption of special food items such as egg, meat and milk of the sample labour households.

Table 5.20 Consumption of Special Food items

Particulars	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
No Consumption	30	29	31	90	30.00
Very rarely	62	61	60	183	61.00
Frequently	8	10	9	27	9.00
Total	100	100	100	300	100.00

It is significant to note that 30.0 per cent of the respondents say that they have not taken special food, while

61 per cent consume it very rarely. About nine per cent of the households frequently consume special food. It is evident from the above analysis that low income of the labourers do not permit them to incur expenditure on special food items and it is clearly seen in the case of the scheduled caste labour households.

The sample agricultural labour households spend the remaining income on different items such as fuel and lighting, clothing, education, services, medicine and festivals and ceremonies. Table (5.19) gives the details about the distribution of income on such items. In the case of fuel and lighting, they spend three to seven per cent of their income. About 35 per cent of the respondents utilize five per cent of their total income on this item. Besides, the occasional expenditure in the family also includes the money incurred on clothing. In fact, the labour households spend small amount on clothing. The particulars are given in the Table (5.19). They spend six to nine per cent of their total income on clothing. The analysis of expenditure on clothing reveals that the labour households cannot afford adequate clothing for all the family members. The other items such as medicine and other cover five to 12 per cent for festivals and ceremonies utilize two to five per cent and seven to 11 per cent on education and services.

On the other hand, the female labourers do not spend money on liquor and other related articles as the men generally do. At the same time, about 40 per cent of the respondents spend up to two per cent of their income every day on chewing tobacco and 60 per cent of the households are free from it. It is observed that the majority of the husbands (69 per cent) spend their income on non-familial items such as liquor and on smoking and do not support the family either by purchasing food materials or by attending to any of the family needs. The husbands who spend their earnings on alcohol, force the families into poverty and misery. Also male members bribe money of their wives and sisters for the purposes like drinking, gambling and conspicuous consumption. This explains that women workers are exploited adversely. These habits not only injurious to their health but also decreases the economic level of the households. The husbands spend what they earn at the liquor shops than for the welfare of the households. As a consequence it will deteriorate the status of agricultural labour households especially that of female labourers.

Most of the respondents (78 per cent) firmly expressed that women should have an income of their own. Income in women's hands could benefit not only to women

but the whole family, in greater extent than income solely in men's hands. There are systematic gender inequalities in access to basic necessities within households. There are also notable gender differences in income spending patterns. From the views expressed by the labour women, it is clear that there is a correlation between the needs for which the women's income is spent and the point at which she considers it as necessary. The female labourers spend their income on absolute necessities and they consider it as essential. This can be understood by their answers, which included meeting the primary needs of life.

5.4.11 Saving Patterns of the Sample Agricultural Labourers

The size of distributed income of the respondents is not adequate in order to meet the daily requirements. They spend major part of their income on consumption and therefore, only the groups higher in the scale would be able to save. The chance for saving, among the agricultural labourers is relatively low. The lower income during their working days, seasonal employment, low wages, number of family dependents, all force them to discourage from the aspect of saving. Because of low wage and income, they are not able to meet the basic necessities of life. The consumption pattern reveals that they are not in a position

fulfilling their minimum facilities. In such a situation, there is no question of saving either in the form of money or consumer durables. In order to fulfill the traditional ceremonies and customs in the society such as marriage and ceremonies, they often borrow from moneylenders or land owners at high rate of interest.

Agricultural labourers' savings are primarily on property or land requirement, livestock and the reduction of mortgages and other debt, relatively little is in LIC, government bonds or bank deposits. It is important to note that though large number of the respondents is in debts, few of them could save money to meet the incidental expenses with their savings. But they have no regular saving. It is also significant to note from the Table (5.21) that 25 per cent of the respondents who have saving, have chosen kuries to keep their savings. The remaining persons have not chosen either in kuries or in banks and keep their savings with secretly. They interested the keep their own savings with them secretly. The necessities rather compelled them to give top priority such as payment of debts and marriage of children rather than spending the savings on productive purposes.

Table 5.21 Pattern of saving of the respondents

(in rupees)

Income category	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Saving					
Yes	15	14	11	40	13.33
No	85	86	89	260	86.67
Means to Preserve					
Banks	Nil	Nil	Nil	-	-
Kuries	5	3	2	10	25.0
At home	10	11	9	30	75.0
Amount of saving					
Less than Rs.500	10	7	2	19	47.5
501 - 600	1	2	3	6	15.0
601 - 700	3	3	4	10	25.0
701 and above	1	2	2	5	12.5

Table (5.21) gives the details of pattern of saving made by the female agricultural labourers. It is evident from the table that in the majority of the households (47.5 per cent) who have saving falls in the category of less than Rs. 500. This is followed by 25 per cent whose saving ranges between Rs. 601 and 700. The saving of about 15

per cent of the respondents falls between Rs. 501 and 600. Only 12.5 per cent of them, who have saving falls in the category of Rs. 701 and above.

5.4.12 Indebtedness of Sample Labour Households

Indebtedness is a growing problem and a malady among the rural agricultural labour households. The plight of agricultural labours in particular, is worse, primarily due to their meagre earnings. The poverty creating wages, seasonal nature of employment and the consequences of inflation lead the rural agricultural labourers to a large scale indebtedness. Their condition is extremely poor and to fill the gap between the income and expenditure, they depend mostly upon the landowners and village moneylenders at an increased rate. This always increased the incidence of indebtedness among these rural labourers.

The pattern of rural indebtedness and accessibility to credit are other indicators of deterioration in the condition of lower strata of rural labour households. Rural female labourers did not get any chance to over come the socio economic backwardness. As a result, the over crowding of these labourers in agriculture sector is still continued. They remain indebted not only because of they

happen to be poor but also due to the tendency to spend more than what they can afford on the social and personal gratification including their husband's addiction and gambling.

It is evident from Table (5.22) that 67.34 per cent of the female agricultural labourers' households are in debt and 32.66 per cent of the households are free from debts. The majority of the agricultural labour households are indebted and the amounts they owe range from less than 1000 to 7001 and above. It is significant to note that 43.56 per cent of the labourers owe amounts ranging from Rs.3001 to 5000. They are followed by 17.33 per cent of the respondents who owe amounts in the range of less than Rs. 1000 and 15.84 per cent of the respondents have debts ranging between Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2000.

Table (5.22) also furnishes the details of various source of loan available to the agricultural labour households. It is significant to note from Table (5.22) that 57.92 per cent of the sample households took loans from the moneylenders and landowners. About 30.20 per cent borrowed from private institutions. Only 11.88 per cent of the respondents approached banks to raise loans. The above analysis reveals the fact that the majority of

households are in the clutches of the moneylenders and landowners. The pressing needs compelled the sample respondents to seek loans from the landlords at high rates of interest.

Table 5.22 Particulars of Amount and Source of Loan Among the Sample Labour Households

Items	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Indebtedness					
Yes	66	67	69	202	67.34
No	34	33	31	98	32.66
Amount (in rupees)					
Less than 1000	7	13	15	35	17.33
1001-3000	10	10	12	32	15.84
3001-5000	30	30	28	88	43.56
5001-7000	15	7	8	30	14.85
7001 and above	4	7	6	17	8.42
Total	66	67	69	202	100
Source of Loan					
Banks	8	6	10	24	11.88
Private institutions	20	21	20	61	30.20
Money lenders and Landowners	38	40	39	117	57.92
Total	66	67	69	202	100.0

Table (5.23) shows the various purposes for which the sample respondents raised loans. It is significant to see that a large number of the households (about 39.11 per cent) raised loans to give dowries to their daughters at the time of marriage and to meet the expenses of marriage. About 37.62 per cent of respondents borrowed money for the consumption expenditure including medical treatment while 12.87 per cent for educational purposes. Only 10.4 per cent of the respondents took loans just for productive purposes like purchase of land, improvement of land, construction of house and related facilities and purchase of cattle.

Table 5.23 Purpose of borrowing

Purpose	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Marriage and Related ceremonies	21	28	30	79	39.11
Education	9	8	9	26	12.87
Consumption Expenditure and medical Treatment	28	25	23	76	37.62
Production expenditure	8	6	7	21	10.40
Total	66	67	69	202	100.00

Though there are innumerable reasons for gender discrimination, the old tradition belief of the society that men are masters and decision makers has been one of the major reasons for the subordinate role of women. Women from agricultural labour households do have some say in the matter and they have access and control to some resources. However, in absolute terms the condition is not encouraging. Gender discrimination exists in almost all fields. It is an established fact that most women are often conditioned into unquestioned submission to biases and discrimination which they view as socially ordained and therefore irrevocable.

The constitution of India bestows equal rights and opportunities on all its citizens. As can be made out from the general situation, women are more unequal in the patriarchal society of the world, more so with women in all regions like Palakkad. In the process of development, women have been marginalized and their male counterparts have control over their lives, property, assets, productive sources, power and decision making. In many cases she is the custodian of her wages and salary till she arrives home. Her income later becomes part of the total income of her family. In a societal situation, men and women have differential access to opportunities and services from times

immemorial. It is no exaggeration to infer that the same situation continues to obtain even today, both in the developed and developing regions with some degree of variation.

The over all socio-economic status is a summary index composed of measures of socio-economic condition - education, occupation, income and material possession. A person who has a low status in the caste hierarchy also has low status in other hierarchies of the society such as economic and political. As reflected from various socio-economic indicators like income, wage rates, consumption expenditure, asset holding, level of indebtedness, female labourers constitutes a major part of the lowest strata of the society. It is a fact that agricultural labourers constitute a significant proportion of the total female labour force in Palakkad district of Kerala. Measured by all yard sticks by which economic and social progress are being assessed, the vast bulk of the female agricultural labour community continues to remain in a low state even though some individuals have reached significant heights. They are so backward and poor that they are unable to fight against the exploitation and gradually lost their social status leading to the formation of the lowest stratum of the society.

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PROBLEMS OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN PALAKKAD DISTRICT

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CHAPTER VI

PROBLEMS OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN PALAKKAD DISTRICT

The U.N. Decade for women helped to bring attention to the critical importance of women's activities to economic and social development. However, after fifteen years of effort to integrate women to development, women are still only marginal beneficiaries of development programmes. There is no major field of activity, any country or region, in which women have obtained equality with men. The growth of a region lies in its capacity to raise the lot of the weakest section of its society. It is the patriarchy rather than underdevelopment women remain the most deprived and long neglected segment of the rural society, despite the constitutional guarantee for equality.

The female agricultural labourers in sample areas of Palakkad district on the problems and difficulties face the main focus in this chapter. The main aim of this chapter is to bring out the problems confronted by these labourers which is mainly related to their work, domestic responsibilities and with in the society as a whole. Unfortunately, this section of female labourers in our society, due to many reasons, has not able to take full

advantage. To many, their social backwardness is entirely the result of their economic backwardness. The problem of these workers is cent per cent economic.

The major problems faced by the female agricultural labourers are unorganized nature of work, seasonal employment, low wages, poverty, lack of housing and related facilities, lack of ownership of land and productive assets, domestic responsibilities, lack of control over economic resources and decision making and the gross maltreatment to which they are subjected. Since poverty is one of the important causes of backwardness, the socio-economic factors such as health, education and employment are generally deemed to be very crucial for women's over all development.

6.1 Unorganised Workers

The female agricultural labourers are illiterate, scattered, ununited poor and ignorant and hence they are remained as unorganized and unable to form unions so as to protect their interests. With the result, they are insignificant and unnoticed, and have go to without the benefits of organized efforts for their betterment. Also the

employers and moneylenders mercilessly and hopelessly exploit them.

The unorganised rural labour constitutes a major chunk of the agricultural labour especially female labourers, which has the largest workforce in Palakkad. Since they are unorganised, they are very vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation. By and large, they are not represented by major trade unions or in other organisations, though a large number of organizations including registered trade unions and voluntary organisations have been making various efforts to organise them. There is also dearth of local women's organisations. The working of trade unions among female agricultural labourers is insignificant. The female agricultural labourer's membership in trade union activities in the sample areas is given in Table (6.1)

Table 6.1 Participation in Trade Union Activities

Taluk	Yes	No
Alathur	5	95
Chittur	28	72
Palakkad	18	82
Total	51	249
Percentage	17.00	83.00

It is evident from the Table (6.1) that in Chittur, 28 respondents activity participated in the union activities. However, the participation is less in union activities in Palakkad taluk (18 respondents) and Alathur taluk (5 respondents) compared to Chittur taluk. As a whole 17 per cent of the respondents have membership in trade union activities and 83 per cent have no participation in union activities.

Table 6.2 Participation in Mahila Samaj and Public Meeting

Taluk	Mahila Samaj		Public meeting		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Very rarely
Alathur	10	90	6	67	27
Chittur	30	70	20	50	30
Palakkad	24	76	10	60	30
Total	64	236	36	177	87
Percentage	21.33	78.67	12.00	59.0	29.0

The participation of women agricultural labourers in the activities of the Mahila Samaj is very limited and only a very few women (21.33 per cent) of the concerned villages have enrolled themselves as members. It is evident from Table (6.2) that 10 respondents in Alathur,

30 in Chittur and 24 in Palakkad are the members of the Mahila Samaj and they felt that these are helping for women's advancement. Nearly 78.67 per cent of the respondents do not have any connection with such associations. And only a few female respondents took an active part in the public meetings and participated in the discussions. Nearly 12 per cent of the respondents are actively involved themselves in public meetings and very rarely 29 per cent took their participation in meetings and discussions.

The women members gave a number of reasons for their intermittent absence from the meetings. Most of them are absent from meetings due to their pre-occupation with domestic or agricultural chores. They expressed that their domestic or agricultural chores are more important than attending meeting. This indicate that women in rural society still have a feeling that they are primarily meant for attending to work and their participation outside the family is secondary.

Just as it is seen that the level of representation of women in legislative bodies are inadequate, the role of women labourers of Palakkad in political parties, trade unions and other social movements is also not very note

worthy. Most of the respondents says that they are reluctant to be active because of the politicization of women and their participation in activities out side the home tend to affect family life. However, women are aware of the importance of casting votes in election. Though male members try to influence them, some women act according to their choice. At the election time, the labourers on the whole exercise their voting rights. Apart from this, 1.67 per cent of the respondents have membership in religious organizations and most of them do not have any kind of membership in religious organizations. At the same time, 69.17 per cent of the respondents have faith in women's freedom movements and 30.33 per cent do not have any belief in such movements.

6.2 Seasonal Employment in Agriculture

The female agricultural labourers does not get employment through out the year. They are employed only during the peak seasons, thus they have to face a great difficulty during off seasons. Most of the respondents reported that the casual and seasonal nature of employment in agriculture assures them neither security nor fair wages. This nature of employment in agriculture contributed considerably for the depressive work situation of the

agricultural labourers in general and female agricultural labourers in particular. They also revealed that the agricultural sector does not offer them minimum facilities. Neither work is guaranteed to them nor the minimum facilities are provided to improve their lot. There also exists the problem of off-season during which women in agriculture have to struggle hard to find out alternative source of income. The absence of alternative opportunities for employment is also intensified in rural areas.

In a region like Palakkad, where significant portion of the population is below the poverty line, it is expected that large segment of rural women participation in labour force due to economic compulsion. Most of the respondents (75 per cent) reported that the lack of alternative employment opportunities in the area have forced them to join as agricultural labourers in order to save themselves and other members of their family from starvation. 20 per cent of the respondents had attempted at other items of work such as construction, well digging. But the irregular nature of such works rather compelled them to shift the occupation to that of agricultural labour. At the same time, five per cent revealed that they prefer this occupation to earn more and they are habituated to do this work since their early age. It is significant to note that the

female respondents chose this occupation out of need under the economic compulsion and indebtedness.

6.3 Structure of Employment of Female Labourers

The significance of women employment has been discussed in terms of societal development, women upliftment and securing independent economic status. It is accepted facts that only if women labourers are in the main stream of progress can any economic and social development be meaningful. The structure of employment is varied by sector and by region. Gender related segregation in occupation is one of the prominent natures of agriculture sector. Women employment becomes a basic requisite for the upliftment of the women socially and economically.

Female agricultural labourers form a sizeable portion of the working population of Palakkad district. As a result of poverty and low standard of living, there is a tendency among rural females to enter into wage labour. The employment structure of an economy is closely related with the sector that provides of more available days of employment opportunities. The district of Palakkad, especially the rural sector traditionally owes to its agriculture sector. This district has peculiar characteristic

that the female labourers are more prone to the agriculture for employment and most of them are economically poor and socially backward and disadvantaged. The bulk of women's employment opportunities are also in paddy cultivation.

The main characteristic of agricultural labour employment is that they do not have continuous work and is seasonal in nature. The operations and tasks in the agricultural fields vary depending on the cropping pattern, nature of land, irrigation facilities and the area under cultivation. The type of employment in which female agricultural labourers are engaged, the time duration of being employed in their given field is examined briefly here. Employment facilities to rural female agricultural labourers are poor. The women agricultural labourers are engaged mainly in uprooting of seedlings, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing the crops and winnowing. During the peak season they work regularly. Perhaps the only one out door activity of women is work in the paddy field. They get two to six days work in a week during season. A season provides work for a period of nearly two months and there are mainly two seasons in a year and some gets employment during the third season of paddy cultivation.

In Palakkad, the month of September is the busiest one. Labour participation alone is not a very efficient measure of employment available to labour households. It only indicates the proportion of workers who are working during a year. The percapita employment can be calculated on the basis of labour intensity per hectare of net sown area. During September, employment is high in Palakkad due to the harvesting of the first crop and the preparation of fields and transplanting of seedlings are carried out. The Table (6.3) shows the available average monthly employment days of the respondents.

Table 6.3 Number of Average Monthly Employment Days of the Respondents

Taluk	Less than 8	9 - 10	11 - 12	13 and above
Alathur	20	50	26	4
Chittur	30	60	10	-
Palakkad	32	52	15	1
Total	82	162	51	5
Percentage	27.33	54.0	17.0	1.67

More than half of the respondents (54 per cent) get employment a period ranging between 9-10 days per month. Only 1.67 per cent gets employment for 13 and

above days in Palakkad. It is significant to note that 27.33 per cent of the respondents get less than eight days per month.

For the remaining days, female labourers have either to take up some other works such as construction works or remain at home. The employment data explains the deplorable condition of the female agricultural labourers. The available number of days of employment is low for females and at the same time, there is the problem of low and unequal wages. It is clear that those rural female labourers who do not have a certain regular employment, the wage rate alone are not an adequate guarantee of income. So they are found in the lowest income bracket in the society.

Seasonal conditions, as a matter of fact, directly influence demand and supply of agricultural labourers. Agricultural production now depends overwhelmingly on female labour. At the same time, the nature of work, women do in agriculture is to a greater extent than for men, casual in nature. And while casualisation has been increasing for both sex, the increase has been more for women.

The main reasons for the reduction in the available number of days of employment to the female agricultural labourers are due to the loss of area under cultivation, increase in the cost production and the changes that happened in agricultural and related activities due to the introduction of modern technology and practices.

6.3.1 Loss of Area Under Cultivation

In Palakkad, there is work, but the landlords cut short the number of days by reducing the area under cultivation due to the increase in wages. Palakkad district which accounts for the largest area under the crop and which has the benefit for maximum irrigation support, suffered the largest fall in area, which can be seen from the Table (6.4). As a result of fall in the area under cultivation, the number of working days available to the females has fallen. Some respondents (56 per cent) say that the crop is better in some seasons and as a result they get more paddy during the harvesting season.

In a technological advanced society, the female agricultural labourers have no chance to enter into other fields of work. As a whole, 4.33 per cent of the respondents have got occupational wise training or experiences. Most of

the respondents (95.76 per cent) have no such training and they remained as unskilled workers.

Table 6.4 Land Utilisation for Paddy Cultivation in Palakkad (1996-99)

Year	Area under cultivation (hectares)
1996-97	128359
1997-98	120809
1998-99	107467

Source: Government of Kerala, Economic Review, 1999. p. s. 34

6.3.2 Technological Changes and Level of Employment

Some of the new technologies have further added to the problem as these have displaced women from agriculture sector. Such women try to take up any work available to them in or near their villages that is building construction and road construction. Modernization through out the world has brought advantage to different groups including some women and big landowners, predominantly male being the first to benefit. Mechanization implies an increased demand for trained personnel and a reduction in that for unskilled manual

labour, effectively excluding women. Women particularly those of lower socio-economic groups, have suffered rather than benefited from them. Mechanization in developing areas has often meant reducing the availability of jobs for women, rather than lightening their burden. Women's economic activities decline sharply in areas where modernised technology in agriculture is used compared to villages where traditional farming is still pursued.

Modernisation affects the employment opportunities of both males and females. However, it affected more on female employment because of the following reasons: Machines tend to replace work traditionally performed by females and because of the higher literacy rate, males are generally trained and skilled to operate the machines. There are no machines for sowing and weeding and farmers on the whole think that although desirable, labour saving devices is resisted. No machine is used for harvesting and it is the time when most of the labourers in Palakkad are fully employed.

In Palakkad, mechanization in cultivation appeared in the form of tractors and pump sets for irrigation. Even though, there is less scope for mechanization in Kerala agriculture, due to the dominance

for plantation crops, undulating topography of land, subdivision and fragmentation of land holding, but recently, there has been a steady increase in the demand for tractors and power tillers from the major rice growing districts. This kind of mechanization will generally decrease the available days of employment for male workers. The women labour were asked whether recent changes in cultivation practices including the use of high yielding varieties of seeds, modern chemical fertilizers, irrigation facilities and introduction of rice mills gave more work to women. Some merely said there is no change in that aspect. 60 per cent of the respondents reported that their number of working days is reduced due to such kind of applications in agricultural fields and related activities. At the same time, there is a declining trend among the young generation to enter into agriculture especially as labourers. Whether they are socially or economically poor. Nearly 83 per cent of the respondents reported that the young generation is not interested in following the footprints of their parents to continue as agricultural labourers.

6.4 Working Hours and Mode and Rate of Payment

Working hours is important not only to study the balance between the rest and work but also to indicate the

extent and degree of exploitation. The most important feature of the agricultural work situation of labourers is acceptance of fixed and definite hours and regulation of mode of payment. The hours of work and work schedules are the same in all the sample areas of Palakkad district. The farmers and landowners have accepted the regulations of working hours largely due to the persistence of trade unions. The Table (6.5) shows the working hours of labourers and the mode and rate of payment that exist in the sample areas.

Table 6.5 Working Hours and Mode and Rate of Payment

Particulars	Taluk		
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad
Working hours	8	8	8
Mode of payment (except harvesting and threshing)	Cash	Cash	Cash
Harvesting and threshing	Piece-wage in kind	Piece-wage in kind	Piece-wage in kind

A day's of labour involves eight hours of work for women with forenoon work, beginning at 8.00 AM continuing up to 5.00 PM. There is fixation of working day to eight hours. The reduction in working hours and the success in eliminating several form of ill treatment are the

first gain of the union. A reduction in and setting of fixed daily working hours is eight hours in Palakkad district of Kerala.

For the present analysis, by mode is meant whether the payment is made in cash or in kind; and rate of payment refers to whether a labourer is paid on time basis or piece basis. Wages in Palakkad district are generally paid either in cash or in kind or both in cash and in kind. For the work, a variety of payment systems are reported. During harvesting operations, piece wage in kind amounting to one-seventh of harvested output is paid to both sex and in this case no working schedule is insisted upon. In the case of all other important operations, time rate system is practiced payable daily in cash or in kind, however, in this case, all respondents prefer to get wages in cash than in kind.

Given the wage rate, mode of payment is determined by the profit consideration of the landlord. If ruling market price of paddy is low, wages will be paid in kind and cash receipt will be insisted upon when market price of paddy is high as money wage is less adjusted to paddy price. Females are discriminated in time rate system. At the same time, under piece wage system females are not

discriminated. These variations in wage rate can only be explained by customs, practice and labour attachment rather than by any other economic reason.

6.5 Wage Rates of Agricultural Labourers in Palakkad District

The female labourers employed in agriculture where work is more arduous and conditions are poor. The wages and benefits offered for women labourers are very low. In almost all parts of Palakkad district, a sexual division of labour characterizes even agricultural activity. Some operations are exclusively done by women and are often back breaking and low paying. There are a number of activities, which are done by both sex, women are inevitably paid less than men.

The aspect of agricultural wage is related to the movement of agricultural production, the trade union movement and the cereal prices. Women workers generally get lower wages than men even for similar works. A wide disparity exists between the earnings of men and women workers. The practice of paying a lower wage for agricultural labourers are not only peculiar to India but are also found in different regions of Kerala state. There is

gender disparities in wages are found to be conspicuously large in many regions.

Agricultural operations like ploughing and post harvest operations, which carry higher rewards are generally performed by male workers. On the other hand women workers predominantly perform operations such as transplanting and weeding with relatively lower wages. Sex-biased nature of agriculture that differentiates the work done by women from that done by men is the cause for disparity in their wages. Even though there is an increasing trend in wages of agricultural labourers in Kerala, there is a disparity in wages in different regions. On the basis of the regions, Palakkad records one of the low wage regions among the districts of Kerala State. The rice growing areas of Palakkad district also shows an inequity in the trends of wages by gender as well as region.

The average wage rate for different agricultural operations earned by the male and female agricultural labourers have been incorporated in Table (6.6). It shows significant differences in wages of males and females in the operations in which both are employed. In weeding, women are earning Rs.35 to 40 per day while men are getting Rs.50 to 55 in Chittur taluk of Palakkad district. In Alathur and

Palakkad taluks, this is Rs.35 for females and Rs.50 for male. In harvesting and threshing, both are getting equal as they are paid in kind that is 1/7 part of the harvest or the produce. In transplanting where time and money wage is prevalent, which is the same as in the case of weeding. The average wage of females per hour in Alathur and Palakkad taluk is Rs.4.38 and Rs.5.00 in Chittur taluk.

Table 6.6 Sex-wise Wages for Different Agricultural Operations

(Rs/day)

Operations	Taluks					
	Alathur		Chittur		Palakkad	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ploughing	80	-	80	-	80	-
Sowing	60	-	60	-	60	-
Weeding Transplanting	50	35	50-55	35-40	50	35
Harvesting and Threshing (in kind)	1/7	1/7	1/7	1/7	1/7	1/7
Other Agricultural Works	50	35	55	40	50	35

The wages of women are less than the wages of men even in operations, which are women intensive and are

better performed by them such as weeding and transplanting. Significant variations are noticed between wages for different activities. The economic rating of an operation is not done by the quality of work or end product but by whether it is done by male or female. Women such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting and winnowing perform the operations, which demand direct annual labour. The presence of sexual division of labour in agricultural operations was found to be having an impact on wage differentials between women and men.

6.5.1 Discrimination in Wages

It is a fact that women in many regions are facing discriminatory attitude in varying degrees on the ground of sex, employment, wage and working conditions. It is accepted as natural that women should receive lower pay than men, even when they are performing the same task. It is partly because it is believed that women's productivity is lower, despite much contrary evidence, and partly because it is assumed that women's income supplements that of men.

In agricultural sector, the remuneration and division of work is highly sex based. Discrimination is

manifest in the male and female earnings. Though the existing legislations like the Minimum Wages Act and Equal Remuneration Act do not permit discrimination in wages on the ground of sex, the daily earnings of women labourers are generally less than those of men. The sexual division of work in agricultural operations was found to be having an impact on wage differentials between male and female.

The average daily earnings are more in peak time operations like ploughing, harvesting and transplanting than in off-peak activities such as weeding, which are mainly female task. The difference may have an impact on women's earnings vis-à-vis those of men. However, in a high wage activity like transplanting the labour input of women is substantial, but here also women's wages are lower than men's though women would come out better in productivity comparison. This is also due to the fact that women are less mobile than men. Due to their family responsibilities, they try to seek poor bargaining power further widens the wage differences. They are much more disadvantaged in their access to information on job opportunities due to lower literacy level, less access to mass media and less interaction with market place.

6.6 Poverty and Agricultural Labour Households

The incidence of poverty is usually high in rural agricultural areas. There is a shift from family employed peasants to wage labourers among females in rice growing areas, which reflects the rising landlessness and the poor work options. The incidence of poverty is closely related to the nature of employment. In rural areas, the incidence of poverty is highest in agricultural labour households because they are mainly casual workers.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional aspect and is associated with socio-economic variables, which are related to these labour households. They are monthly income, size of land owned and livestock ownership, housing facilities, education, caste and other household amenities such as source of drinking water, sanitation and energy.

6.6.1 Income and Standard of Living

In every economy, women play a prominent role at various levels. Poor women work for the survival of their family. The level of living can be realized on the basis of their family income. According to the estimates of Planning Commission, a family of five members is said to be just

above poverty line, if it has the monthly income of Rs.493 in rural areas and Rs.568 in urban areas on the basis of 1981-82 prices. The VII plan document has redrawn the poverty line to an annual income of Rs.6,400 in rural areas (1984-85). According to the document of Planning Commission, the figure for determining the poverty line has been raised to Rs.22,000 per annum.

On the basis of the document of Planning Commission, the Table (6.7) shows the percentage distribution of poor families among the sample labour households in Palakkad.

Table 6.7 Percentage Distribution of Poor Families by Income

Taluk	Monthly Income		Total
	Below Poverty Line (Less than Rs.1833.33)	Above poverty line	
Alathur	80	20	100
Chittur	85	15	100
Palakkad	85	15	100
Total	250	50	300
Percentage	83.34	16.66	100.0

It is really observed that the standard of living on the basis of income, agricultural labour household remain poor. More than 80 per cent of the respondent's family income falls below Rs.1833.33 per month.

6.6.2 Housing Condition of the Respondents

The quality of life of agricultural labour households is based on housing and related facilities. Agriculture being the major unorganized sector, most of the women is involved in it to eke out their livelihood. This sector involves a large proportion of women labourers drawn from the socially backward classes, and they belong to the lower strata of society. The Table (6.8) gives the housing and related facilities utilized by the sample agricultural labour households. Details regarding the housing condition and facilities are assessed on the basis of the type of the ownership of house, type of the houses, number of living rooms, availability of safe drinking water, availability of sanitation facilities and electricity.

A majority of 97.67 per cent of the household live in their own houses, only 1.33 per cent of the families live in rented houses and one per cent in puramboke lands. About 14 per cent of the families live in thatched houses.

More than half of the households (52.67 per cent) have latrines and only 14.67 per cent have separate bathrooms. At the same time, 53.33 per cent of the sample households enjoyed the electricity facility. However, 88 per cent of the houses have no access to clean drinking water with in the house. It has to be fetched from the nearest municipal tap, panchayat well and neighbours' well. The above analysis also shows that the majority of the labourers live in small and single room tiled houses. The housing condition of the respondents also causes much inconvenience to them. The hut-like houses have no proper ventilation and adequate accommodation.

Table 6.8 Housing Condition and Related Facilities

Category	Taluk			Total	Percentage
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Nature of House					
Own	99 (33.78)	97 (33.11)	97 (33.11)	293	97.67
Rented	0 (0.0)	3 (75.0)	1 (25.0)	4	1.33
On governmental lands (Puramboke lands)	1 (33.33)	0 (0.00)	2 (66.67)	3	1.00
Type of house					
Thatched	5 (11.90)	17 (40.48)	20 (47.62)	42	14.00
Tiled	95 (36.82)	83 (32.17)	80 (31.01)	258	86.00

Number of living rooms						
One		81 (34.03)	74 (31.09)	84 (33.29)	238	79.33
Two		16 (31.37)	22 (43.14)	13 (25.49)	51	17.00
Three and above		3 (27.28)	4 (36.36)	4 (36.36)	11	3.67
Sanitary Facilities						
Latrines	Yes	51 (32.28)	50 (31.65)	57 (36.07)	158	52.67
	No	49 (34.51)	50 (35.21)	43 (30.28)	142	47.33
Bathrooms	Yes	20 (45.45)	13 (29.55)	11 (25.0)	44	14.67
	No	80 (31.25)	87 (33.98)	89 (34.77)	256	85.33
Electricity	Yes	48 (30.0)	60 (37.5)	52 (32.5)	160	53.33
	No	52 (37.14)	40 (28.57)	48 (34.29)	140	46.67
Drinking water facility						
Own well		12 (33.33)	13 (36.11)	11 (30.56)	36	12.0
Panchayath well		20 (33.33)	14 (23.33)	26 (43.34)	60	20.0
Pipe water		62 (33.88)	66 (36.07)	55 (30.05)	183	61.00
Neighbour's well		6 (28.57)	7 (33.33)	8 (38.10)	21	7.00

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage to total respondents of each category

6.6.3 Possession of Land and Other Productive Assets

Rural sector of Palakkad is characterized by low level of standard of living. According to 1991 census, state's population generally depends upon low productive assets.

The main reasons for rural economic backwardness in Palakkad are due to poor assets and low level of income. The bargaining power of the female labourers is low because of their limited access to productive assets. They are economically poor with out land or land with very small in size. The agricultural labour households utilize their major share of their income on consumption than productive purposes. The assets of these poor households consist of their small size of land, hut-like houses household goods and livestock, which illustrates their extreme poverty and low level of living.

6.6.3.1 Land

Land and labour are the two key determinants of rural income. Land served as a symbol of prestige, power and status. In a predominantly agrarian economy, the status of the people is directly related to the size and ownership of land. Agricultural land holdings are the main source of livelihood to the rural households in general and agricultural labourers in particular.

As regards land holdings, around 70.31 per cent of the sample households own a small plot of land. No agricultural labour households in three taluks of Palakkad

own more than one acre of land. The division of families on the basis of the extent of size of land holdings is given in Table (6.9).

Table 6.9 Size of Land Holdings

Units of Land (in cents)	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad	Total	Percentage
No land	1	3	3	7	2.39
1 - 10	64	76	66	206	70.31
11 - 20	25	14	22	61	20.82
21 - 30	4	3	5	12	4.10
31 - 40	2	2	2	6	2.05
41 and above	4	2	2	8	2.73

Note: 100 cents = 1 acre

6.6.3.2 Particulars of Land ownership

In general, Palakkad district follows a patrilineal system in which the productive assets are allotted in the name of their men folk. The land status of female agricultural labourers is very poor. Most of the lands are under the ownership of male counterparts. Only 15.36 per cent of women have the right of ownership. Majority of the women have no right on land or property. It is very

significant to note that there is a close relationship between the land and ownership of land in the sample areas of Palakkad.

Table (6.10) Size and Ownership of Land Holdings

Size of land (in cents)	Ownership of land				Total	Percentage
	Husband	Wife	Father-in-law/ son	Mother-in-law/ Daughter		
1 - 10	154	19	30	3	206	70.31
11 - 20	35	13	7	6	61	20.82
21 - 30	10	1	1	0	12	4.10
31 - 40	3	1	1	1	6	2.05
41 and above	4	0	3	1	8	2.75
Total	206	34	42	11	293	100.0
Percentage	70.31	11.60	14.34	3.76	100.0	

Though there is a close association between the land and ownership, there is no relation between the size of the land holdings and ownership of land. The Table (6.10) shows the association between the size of land holdings and its ownership in the sample areas.

The calculated value of χ^2 is 17.3 and table value of χ^2 at five per cent level is 21. The calculated value is less than the table value. So in this case the hypothesis that the

size of land and ownership of land are independent not dependent, is rejected.

Majority of those who own land that is less than 10 cents each. It has to be noted that no labour households own paddy. As a whole, nearly 38 per cent of the households do not have anything more than the house site area. This would naturally force a large mass of labour to depend heavily on their labour power and daily wages. Agricultural labour households are the lowest in terms of land and educational attainments.

6.3.3.3 Ownership of Other Productive Assets (Consumer Durable Goods and Cattle Assets)

Ownership of households' consumer durable goods, which indicate well being and economic power. About 40 per cent of the households possess radio and watch, the other goods such as bicycles and televisions are not found to be a common possession. Ownership of non-traditional items like radios, wristwatches increased considerably. With increasing price of gold, it would be more difficult for all, especially the poor to have even the earrings and a small chain they normally cherish.

It is significant to note that only 15 per cent of the households are in possession of one cow per household. A few labourers in the sample have to spare their time to rear the animals like goats and fowls. Though the money earned on these assets is meagre, it has contributed something to economic position of the households. Only little income is made out of the tiny bits of land and the animal, which they possess. The Table (6.11) shows the value of other assets possessed by the agricultural labour households.

Table 6.11 Value of Other Assets*

Value of Assets (in rupees)	Taluk			Total	Percent age
	Alathur	Chittur	Palakkad		
Less than 500	35	30	28	93	31.0
501 - 1000	50	58	60	168	56.0
1001 - 1500	12	10	8	30	10.0
1501 - 2000	2	1	2	5	1.67
2001 and above	1	1	2	4	1.33

* The other assets include all assets except the value of land and house.

It is evident from the table that 13 per cent of the sample labour households have the assets worth of Rs.1001 and above 2000. About 56 per cent of the

household concentrated in the category of Rs.501- 1000. As the value of assets increased, the number of households who own that much assets is decreased.

6.7 Domestic Responsibilities

It is an established fact that majority of the people effectively categorised the function of women in an economy into productive and unproductive. The productive functions of women come under the income generating operation that is wage employment; the unproductive functions refer to non-remunerative and confined to the household and related activities. The situation on the economic front is no better. The women's work in the house, which includes collection of firewood, fetching of water and helping in the family business or in the fields is not recognized because they are not paid for it. It is estimated that the average hours of unpaid work done by women outside, their home ranges from 6 to 7.5 per day with some women working for 8 or 9 hours and more. Agricultural women are burdened with two kinds of jobs, one with the house and the other at the work place.

Women in general are not treated on a par with men either in the family or outside. As long as women are

engaged in the household duties their position and status remains to be lower and a restricted one. Like any other married working women, the female agricultural labourers have to shoulder the family responsibilities besides attending to their work outside the home. The work they do in the agricultural field and at home makes them tense and ultimately affects their health to a considerable extent. In spite of all this, they get no humane treatment from their husbands and other family members. Majority of them do not receive any help from their husbands in the household chores. Table (6.12) gives us the particulars pertaining to this aspect.

Table 6.12 Sharing of Family Responsibility

Taluk	Not Receiving help	Receiving help
Alathur	55	45
Chittur	60	40
Palakkad	65	35
Total	180	120
Percentage	60.00	40.00

It is observed from Table (6.12) that only 40 per cent of the female agricultural labourers received help from their spouses, while majority of the respondents (60 per cent) did not receive any help from their spouses in

discharging the household duties. They opined that they did not receive any help from the other members of the family in discharging the household duties even during emergency. At the same time, the maximum number of the respondents about 47 per cent received help from their children in the household chores. About 35 per cent of the respondents revealed that their parents, children and others help them during sickness. These seem to be clear out demarcation in the male and female responsibilities at home. Most of the household work is on the shoulders of females. Cooking is the major item of work for the women. During the morning hours and late hours in the night women are busily engaged in the household chores besides working fields in between.

The work at home is considered to be exclusively that of women though both men and women work in the fields for equal number of hours. However, it is significant to note that women also have come to accept the dual roles since times immemorial without any opposition and this trend is obvious from the present sample. It shows that as high as 70 per cent of the sample respondents reported that they are quite comfortable with their both responsibilities and the problem of adjustment hardly arise before them. Only 30 per cent reported that it was very difficult for them

to discharge both the responsibilities of a housewife and a workingwomen. They said that it becomes so difficult some time for them that they are compelled to think in terms of quitting the job.

It is also significant to note the distance between the dwelling places of respondents and their working place. About 50 per cent of the respondents reported that because of the burden of household work and the long distance between the house and working place, they have some problem to reach at their working places at the right time. During the season of hard work, they find their labour very tedious.

6.8 Recreation Facilities

Recreation facilities are expected to bring some relief to workingwomen in a world torn between work outside and domestic chores. The respondents give information to their preferences of recreational activities like watching television, listening radio and going to theatre. Cinema is the cheapest means of entertainment available to the majority of the female agricultural labourers. However, significantly, the majority of the respondents (55 per cent) do not witness movies. It is only the remaining 45 per cent

of the respondents who see movies every now and then. The female agricultural labourers opined that the poor economic position reminds them of their responsibility towards their family and children. Hence, women occasionally witness movies unlike their men. Other important recreation facilities are watching public and neighbours television and listening radio. Thus the recreation facilities meant for the people are beyond the reach of the agricultural labourers who live at the lowest rung of the occupational hierarchy and whose earnings are not adequate.

Apart from these facilities, 35 per cent of the female agricultural labourers visited the houses of friends and relatives. 60 per cent of them spend their time at market places and 50 per cent frequently visited the temples and churches. The important means to get news to the sample female agricultural labourers are through mingling and talking with people, listening the radio, newspapers and television. Most of the people (76 per cent) get news through talking and mingling with other people. Nearly 49.33 per cent listen the radio to get news. The role of newspapers and television is insignificant when compared to other means to get news.

6.9 Gender Inequalities and Discrimination in Child Care

In the present context, gender inequality means the discrimination and differential treatment accorded to feminine gender. The absence of a healthy and conducive environment in all respects, familial, educational and social including health and nutritional aspects are posing serious problems to the girl child. When we look into the socialisation of girls, we could see right from birth differential treatment is meted out to the boy and girl. Apart from this, parents also use double standards and different codes of rearing a boy and a girl. In terms of food, clothing, social contacts, games, responsibility of household, the girl is taught and reared differently from a boy. Generally, the male children in the family are served with fresh food along with the male members of the family while the female children are given the left over.

Another area of discrimination is related to household work. The main complaint of many girls is the amount of domestic work they have to do. The female children work more and yet are treated by their parents as a liability. It is very significant to note the attitude of respondents towards the girl child. 28 per cent of the respondents have not showed any preference towards girl or

boy child. The remaining respondents prefer boy child than that of girl child. Most of the female agricultural labourers opined that girl child is a liability to the family.

Table 6.13 Expenditure on Education of Children

Taluk	Preference to			
	Boys	Girls	Both	N.A
Alathur	45	32	10	13
Chittur	41	28	15	16
Palakkad	43	26	22	9
Total	129	86	47	38
Percentage	43.0	28.67	15.67	12.66

It is very essential to note that there should be growing concern about the education of children of female agricultural labourers. Poverty and need to employ children on farms and other family occupations discouraged socially and economically backward groups from sending their children to school. At the same time there is significant change in the literacy rates especially in the case of children of rural workers. Even though education is viewed as panacea for solving all issues relating to development, it is not satisfactory with respect to the girls especially who come from poor socio-economic background. In the case of many

of these girls who dropout, it has been a forced drop out, because of the grave inequality practiced in rural or poor class families. Again out of economic hardships the family has made the labour of these girls both inside and outside of the family compulsory. The Table (6.13) shows the preference towards expenditure on education of children.

Most often the agricultural labour households prioritize boys' education over the girls' education. As far as the education of children of agricultural labour respondents is concerned, if children are admitted into schools, the male children are preferred. Education for the girls is an insignificant matter than boys. Further, analysis reveals that the majority of the agricultural labour households are unable to spend on education of their children and only few of their children attend schools. This is mainly due to low income, poverty and lack of interest towards education among the parents. Further, they cannot afford to send their children to schools, as they are also the breadwinners. The majority of the parents opined that their miserable economic condition compel them to make their children earn something for the family. Majority of the respondents (43 per cent) felt that education is useful to boys and not to girls and they further emphasized that they, by sending their female children to school, cannot afford to do without

their assistance both at home and also at work spot. Most of the respondents opined that there are facilities for education for their children and it is a fact that there is an increasing trend in the educational facilities for school going children compared to past decades.

Table 6.14 Child Care During Mothers' Absence

Taluk	Creche	Angan vadi	Neigh bours	Husbands and family members	Elder Children	None
Alathur	-	2	25	23	15	35
Chittur	-	3	30	20	35	12
Palakkad	-	2	31	21	30	16
Total	-	7	86	64	80	63
Percentage	-	2.33	28.67	21.33	26.67	21

Further, the female agricultural labourers have to leave their children at home while they go for work outside. It is evident from Table (6.14) that 21.33 per cent of the sample households, the younger children who are in the age group of 1-4 years are looked after by the husbands or by the elders when their mothers to work in the fields. In 26.67 per cent of the households, the elder children of the family take care of kids who are left at home. It is evident from the table that children of 21 per cent of the respondents are just left alone with none to look after them.

The neighbours are looking after 28.67 per cent of the children and 2.33 per cent are in anganvadi. There are crèche facilities, but none of the respondents use this facility to care their children when they go for work.

6.10 Control Over Economic Resources and Decision Making

An over whelming number of employed women still consider their husbands as the head of the family despite their increased status on account of being a wage earner. In other words, nominally at least, husbands enjoy the decision making power even when they occupy subordinate economic status. It is interesting to note that despite employment, the women seems to reconcile to their traditional roles in decision making.

In a traditional bound social system, women are far beyond from taking an equal share along with their men in all the activities despite their earning. Basically the family structure in Palakkad continues to be traditional and male dominated. The traditional and male domination continues to be unaffected from times immemorial leaving a great impact on the lives of women in general and of the female agricultural labourers in particular. In a nuclear family, it is the man who dominates the life, exercises

control over the income of his wife and takes all the important decisions related to the family. The Table (6.15) shows the control over decision making in agricultural labour households in the sample areas.

Table 6.15 Decision Making at Home

Particulars	Own	Husband	Both	Others	Total
Education of children	52 (17.33)	183 (61.0)	43 (14.33)	22 (7.34)	300
Occupation of children	52 (17.33)	182 (60.67)	31 (30.33)	24 (8.0)	300
Future decisions	52 (17.33)	200 (66.67)	28 (9.33)	20 (6.67)	300
Purchasing goods	52 (17.33)	204 (68.0)	24 (8.0)	20 (6.67)	300
Control on living expenses	52 (17.33)	209 (69.67)	24 (8.0)	15 (5.0)	300
Others	52 (17.33)	210 (70.0)	27 (9.0)	13 (4.33)	300

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentage to total respondents.

Most of the respondents revealed the fact that decision on a large number of cases are taken by their men folk and they simply obeyed their decision without protest. It is significant to note that 17.33 per cent of the female agricultural labourers take decisions in all the important

issues affecting the family. Though the women work and earn like men, they do not enjoy the decision making authority like men. Opinion of women regarding their role in family matters shows that in most cases family matters are controlled by their husbands and father in case unmarried respondents. However, some husbands usually consult their wives in important matters of the family. Most of the women of sample villages are required to take the permission of their husbands and elders for going out elsewhere. The Table (6.16) shows the freedom of the respondents to express their ideas and opinions.

Table 6.16 Freedom to Express the Ideas and Opinions

Taluk	Yes	No
Alathur	40	60
Chittur	60	40
Palakkad	63	37
Total	163	137
Percentage	54.33	45.67

Most of the women say that they have freedom to express their ideas and opinions to their husbands. However, 45.67 per cent of the respondents, they are not in a position to express their ideas and opinions.

6.11 Alcoholism Among Agricultural Labourers

It is obvious that socio-economic conditions of the agricultural labourers declined though they work hard. Their sheer dependence on labour has aggravated the situation. The social condition in which they live continue to be traditional, exploitative in character and impede the development of the agricultural labourers in general and of the female agricultural labourers in particular.

The economic position of the agricultural labourers in further deteriorated with men's addiction to alcohol and smoking. Majority of the male members in the family spend a considerable share of their income on liquor and smoking, which, in turn affected their women. In some cases, in the drunken state, men beat their women for no fault of theirs.

The helpless condition resulted in discontentment among the family members and also forced them into indebtedness. The majority of the agricultural labourers are in a state of heavy debts. Significantly, in most cases, borrowed amount is spent on unproductive items. Most of the respondents (69 per cent) reported that their husbands are addicted to drinking habits and are

irresponsible and the relationship that exists between a husband and his wife also not up to the mark in the agricultural labour families. In spite of her economic activity and contribution to the family, the working woman occupies low position in both the domestic and social spheres. The diverse domestic duties, child care, long hours of work, and their subservient position at home, have lowered the status of women and enhanced the extent of their dependence on men.

6.12 Quality of Life Index

Quality of life index can be assessed on the basis of the housing condition and related facilities like drinking water facilities with in the house, sanitation facilities, electrification, ownership of agricultural land, other productive assets in order to identify the poor families among the sample respondents. It has been constructed by giving appropriate scores to individual variables. The maximum score of variables are sixty. A household who have 20 or below 20 aggregate score has been taken as poor, moderate if the value is between 20 and 40, good when score is between 40 and 50 and very good when it is 50 and above. The Table (6.17) shows the Quality of Life Index on the basis of level of living of the sample households.

Table 6.17 Quality of Life Index

Taluk	Level of living				Total
	Poor	Moderate	Good	Very good	
Alathur	81	15	4	0	100
Chittur	86	12	2	0	100
Palakkad	83	14	3	0	100
Total	250	41	9	0	300
Percentage	83.34	13.66	3.00	0.0	100.0

It is significant from the table to note that 83.34 per cent of the households are included in the category of poor. About 13.66 per cent are included in the group of moderate. Most of the houses of the sample respondents' are in a deplorable condition. On the other hand, there is over crowding, as space availability is low.

The real position of the female agricultural labourers is related to their casual nature of work, the level agricultural output and the prices of consumer goods. These factors have an immediate effect on standard of living, poverty and hunger. They have difficulty in meeting their basic needs. The majority of those who do participate fully in agriculture, labourers are on sufferance, without equal treatment, security of employment and human conditions of

work. A very large number of them subjected to exploitation of various methods with no protection from society or the state.

6.13 Changing Role of Female Agricultural Labourers in the Context of Land Reforms in Kerala.

Female agricultural labourer, who occupies a high place in Palakkad agriculture sector, is the most backward in comparison with other labourers. Most of those associated with agriculture live a life of utter poverty. They lack resources and means to earn even a minimum physical existence. A significant number of these belong to such weaker sections as land with small in size. Many of them belong to socially back ward castes.

In a rural society, land is the most relevant source of living for a large section of the people, and the rights on land confer socio-economic status and dignity. Equitable distribution of land appears as a sign of greater equality and dignity to man. Land reforms are of prime importance because agriculture is the largest economic sector in Palakkad district of Kerala state. Distribution of land to the poor is an important component of the government policy for their upliftment.

The existence of large number of female agricultural labourers who lack sustained employment and frequently suffer from social handicaps is to be regarded as a source of serious weakness and even of instability in the agrarian system. In this section, an attempt is made to assess the impact of land reforms in Palakkad as a part of the comprehensive programme for the betterment of socially and economically back ward agricultural labourers.

The objectives of land reforms should be to remove the impediments to agricultural development as arise from the existing agrarian structure and to eliminate exploitation and promote social justice within agrarian system so as to ensure equality of tenurial status and opportunity to all. The purpose of land reforms is two fold. On the one hand, it aims at making rational use of the scarce land resource by affecting conditions of holding, imposing ceilings on floor of land holding. On the other hand, it means redistributing agricultural land in favour of less privileged classes and improving the terms and conditions under which the land is held for cultivation by the actual tillers (Radhakrishnan, 1992).

The pattern of land distribution and the nature of interests, which different sections of society have in land,

therefore, have important implications for the country's social structure and agrarian relations. The three main categories of interests in land, which constitute the rural social structure of economy, are landowners, tenure holders (tenants) and the landless agricultural labourers. Two aspects of agrarian relations, which continue in society, are the relation between the landowners and tenants and between cultivators and agricultural labourers.

The agrarian relation was basically a class relation but in course of time, it got structured with in the framework of the paramount evaluative principle of the society, viz., the principle of caste system. As a result, the agrarian relation system became an essential part of the caste stratification with higher castes owning the land, the middle castes cultivating them either as tenants or subtenants, and the socially backward castes supplying most of the wage labour for cultivation. From an egalitarian point of view, agrarian relation may appear to be an exploitative one, but it continued for generation without causing serious break down. A significant percentage of agricultural labour comprises Scheduled Caste people; there are people of other castes also who are dependent on agricultural wage labour.

6.13.1 Land Reforms in Kerala

It is well recognised that in the battle against hunger and poverty, land reforms are an effective weapon in a rural economy dominated by small and marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. The term land reforms includes not merely redistribution of land but also tenancy and other land management aspects, measures to conserve land use, prevention of its degradation. In agriculture, productivity depends upon two interdependent sets of factors—technology and institutional. The latter consists of factors like distribution of land in favour of tillers. Changes occurring in the agrarian structure through direct intervention of government are characterized as land reforms. The policy of land reforms aims at increasing the output of agricultural commodities with given resources which is likely to help in generating additional income and employment for the majority of rural population, since other sources of economy have a little scope to absorb the burden of ever increasing unemployment (George and Joseph, 1976).

According to the constitution, it is the responsibility of the state governments to enact and implement legislations on land reforms. The role of the central government here is limited to issuing guidelines to

the states on the subject. With the out break of frequent troubles in the agrarian sector the question of land reforms engaged the serious attention of the government. The Legislative Assemblies passed some Acts but they could not deal effectively with the problems.

With the formation of Kerala State, land reforms received an impetus. In 1957 the Kerala stay of Eviction Proceedings Act (1957) was passed which sought to provide for the temporary protection of tenants, Kudikidappukars and persons cultivating the land on minor sub tenures, at the will of the landlords. Another important Legislation was the Compensation for Tenants Improvement Act, 1958.

In 1960, the Kerala Agrarian Relations Act was passed. This was the first unified legislation, which sought to introduce comprehensive land reforms in the state. The government enacted the Kerala Ryothwari Tenants and Kudikidappukars protection Act, 1962 for the temporary protection of tenants and Kudikidappukars. The Kerala High Court declared this Act also as null and void in its application to most parts of the state. Following this judgment, the Kerala Tenants and Kudikidappukars Protection Act, 1963 was enacted giving temporary

protection to tenants in the matter of eviction and recovery of arrears of rent (Paulini, 1979).

The government examined the provision of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Act, 1960 in the light of the judgments of the Supreme Court, High Court and the various representations received by them. Accordingly, the Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963 was passed. The Act has since been amended in 1969, 1971, 1972 and 1979. The Kerala land Reforms Act, as amended, envisages mainly the following three aspects.

- a) Conforming of full ownership on the cultivating tenants
- b) Fixity of occupation to the Kudikidappukars and conferment of the right to purchase small extent of land in and around their hutment.
- c) Ceilings on land holdings take over and distribution of surplus lands (GOK, 1976).

6.13.2 The Progress of Land Reforms in Palakkad

As on 30-03-1980, a total number of 5,39,677 applications were received for assignment of landlords' rights to cultivating tenants. Out of this, 5,37, 165

applications have been disposed off leaving a balance of 2512 applications. This works out to 99.5 per cent of disposal. Out of the 5,37,165 disposed off applications, 3,93,376 applications have been allowed, the percentage being 7.32 per cent. 87604 applications have been rejected, the percentage being 16.3.

Table 6.18 Application for Assignment of Landlords' Rights Disposed off (1979-80) in Palakkad

	Tenancy	Kudikidappu
Number of applications for assignment of landlord's right received	539677	638
Cases disposed off		
Allowed	393376	236
Rejected	87606	401
Other disposal	56183	1
Total disposal	537165	638
Number of cases pending disposal	2512	Nil

Source: GOK, Status Paper, Palakkad District, 1980

With regard to Kudikidappukars and Kudiyiruppu, the cases filed for the purchase of Kudikidappu and Kudiyiruppu rights numbered 638 as on 31-03-1980. All these applications have been disposed off 236 cases have been allowed and 401 cases have been rejected. The following Table (6.18) gives us a clear picture about this matter.

6.13.3 Land to the Landless

The implementation of the land legislation especially the Kerala Land Reforms Act helped the vast majority of landless agricultural labourers to become owners of land. Among the beneficiaries of the Act, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes constitute a substantial number for the assignees of surplus land. Under the Land Reform measures in 1980, 913760317 acres of surplus land has been assigned to 12016 beneficiaries out of which 5397 beneficiaries belong to scheduled castes, 848 to scheduled tribes and 5816 others.

The major component of land reforms is distribution of surplus land. The distribution of surplus land in Palakkad is shown in Table (6.19).

Table 6.19 Distribution of Surplus Land in Palakkad District

Year	Number of Beneficiaries				Land distributed			
	Scheduled Castes (SC)	Scheduled tribes (ST)	Others	Total	SC	ST	Others	Total
1985 (in hectares)	8996	1026	9481	19503	5018	848	5526	11392
1995	12634	1220	13195	27043	5584	948	6276	12808
1996 (in acres)	12720	1224	13311	27255	5592	949	6284	12825
1997	12730	1224	13349	27303	5593	949	6287	12829
1999 (in acres)	14206	1239	14889	30134	5764	965	6477	13206

Source: GOK, Economic Review, in different years.

An extent of 13,206 acres of land has been distributed to 30134 families in Palakkad as on 31-12-1999. The beneficiaries of land reforms include 14206 scheduled castes and 1039 scheduled tribes. The extent of land distributed is 5764 acres to scheduled castes and 965 acres to scheduled tribes. Coming to the question of distribution of beneficiaries and area of puramboke land to the families, it is reported that about 331.97 hectares of land have been assigned up to 1-12-1990 under Land Assignment Rules. The total number of families benefited from this assignment Act was 1058. The Table (6.20) shows the details of distribution of beneficiaries and area of poorambooke land in Palakkad district up 31-12-1990.

Table 6.20 Distribution of Beneficiaries and Area of Poorambooke land in Palakkad and Kerala (1990)

(in hectares)

	Total area assigned	Of which area assigned to SC/ST	No. of Families benefited	Of which SC/ST	Percentage of SC/ST beneficiaries
Palakkad	331.97	98.85	1058	748	71
Kerala	184581.74	27241.90	535770	102103	19

Source: GOK, Economic Review, 1990

6.13.4 Land Reforms and Status of Female Agricultural Labourers

One of the most radical and egalitarian measures resorted to by a Kerala in the agricultural front was the effective implementation of land reforms through the Land Reforms Act of 1963. Various tenancy legislations have had adverse effects. The provision of a large measure of protection to tenants set into motion processes of mass evictions of tenants, subtenant and sharecroppers through various legal and extra legal devices (GOI, 1976). Consequently, large scale evictions have taken place which have converted the tenants to farm labourers.

In effect tenancy legislation has led to large-scale conversion to tenants into agricultural labourers during the period 1951-1971. The proportion of agricultural labourers to the total workforce and to total agricultural workers substantially increased. The implementation of land reforms during 1970's and 1980's and the increasing cost of cultivation could have partly contributed to the decline trend in proportion of cultivators in the primary sector. This drastic decline was partly off setted by the increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers. (Bardhan, 1970; Pillai, 1994).

Though there is occupational diversification in Kerala and Palakkad economy, however, the section of female agricultural labourers are the largest group in the workforce according to the 1991 census report. It is significantly to note that there is rapid increase in the share of female agricultural labourers is 74.76 per cent in 1971. Similarly, though the share of labourers in the primary sector declined only marginally in 1981 and 1991 in Palakkad. Thus one of the most striking aspects of the change in the composition of workers in the primary and inter sector, particularly in the proportion of female labourers is marginal and less pronounced. Majority of them (70.17 per cent) are still in the agriculture as labourers in Palakkad. The main reason is that high pressure of population among agricultural labour households, poverty due to the partition of property, indebtedness, eviction of tenants, increased cost of cultivation and decrease in the price of agricultural output and less employment opportunities in different sectors

6.13.5 Acquisition of Land holdings

As regards the nature of the acquisition of land holdings among the sample agricultural labour house holds in Palakkad is given in Table (6.21)

Table 6.21 Nature of Acquisition of land ownership

Feature		Average size of land holding (in cents)			Total	Percentage
		1-10	11-40	41 and above		
Normal	a)Ancestral property	16 (72.72)	3 (13.64)	3 (13.64)	22	7.51
	b)Purchase of land	5 (62.5)	2 (25.0)	1 (12.5)	8	2.73
Land reforms	a)Settlement of ownership	97 (82.20)	18 (15.25)	3 (2.55)	118	40.27
	b)Surplus land distribution	88 (60.69)	56 (38.62)	1 (0.69)	145	49.49
Total		206 (70.31)	79 (26.96)	8 (2.73)	293	100.00

Note: Figures in brackets indicate the percentage to total respondents of each category

The Table (6.21) reveals that 49.49 per cent of the land holdings among the sample households were acquired by way of land reforms especially through the surplus land distribution. 40.27 per cent of the land holdings through settlement of ownership or through 'Pattayam'. Only 10.24 per cent of the household gets land through inheritance and purchase of land holdings from others.

The majority of the economically and socially backward groups get land through the implementation of land reforms especially during 1976 and 1980's. The Table (6.22) shows the caste-wise and gender-wise pattern of beneficiaries of ownership of acquisition due to Land Reforms.

Table 6.22 Caste-wise and Gender-wise pattern of beneficiaries of ownership Acquisition Due to Land Reforms

Caste	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Hindu Ezhava	50 (76.92)	15 (23.08)	65	24.72
Scheduled Caste	176 (89.80)	20 (10.20)	196	74.52
Christian	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1	0.38
Muslim	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1	0.38
Total	228 (86.69)	35 (13.31)	263	100.00

Note: Figures in brackets indicate the percentage to total respondents of each category

Most of the land holdings are owned by the males than females among the sample labour households in Palakkad. The female labourers own only 13.31 per cent of

the holdings. It is significant to note that among the agricultural labour households, the Scheduled Castes is the largest section (74.52 per cent) that benefited from the ownership acquisition through land reforms.

Assets are considered to be perhaps, the most effective means of employment generation. This is particularly true in the case of rural economics, when agriculture and allied activities provide the backbone of the economy of the economy. Land generates direct employment opportunities to both male and female workers in the rural areas. Most of the poor labour households have extremely small size of holdings of less than 10 cents each. Such holdings are incapable of providing full time employment to any single member of the household. The inability of land in generating employment opportunities on a large scale in rural areas is reflected in employment pattern.

The ownership of the land holding remains unequal. Further, the number of marginal farmers as well as land less farm workers have significantly increased even as there has also been a decline in the number of self-employed relative to casual labour in the structure of the rural workforce. Land reform is only for the provision of the ownership of land which can provide a minimum of

social security and raise the social status of the under privileged in the sample labour households especially the males, not the females.

The three components of land reforms are untended to eliminate exploitation of the agricultural labourers to improve their economic and social conditions of work and to raise the size of their lands and ensure an egalitarian system. Among these poor, there is a substantial proportion whose land size is very small and less fertile. So on production front, the distributed land holdings acquired by the agricultural labour households through land reforms is insignificant. They have no resources to add on to their lands. Nor have the policies of land reforms made much impact on their farm size. In a sense, productive asset, viz., land, is too small for efficient management. These labour households supplement their income by working as labourers on others' land. The changes in the agrarian system have not been much help to the poor labour households. The reform of the tenurial system has remained incomplete. The poor households, whether working as tenants, or as marginal or small farmers, or landless agricultural labourers, neither holds a reasonable share of land, nor shares a fair degree of fruits of land they cultivate.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Lilly. P. V. "Role of women in agriculture- A case study of female agricultural labourers in palakkad district of Kerala " Thesis. Department of Economics, Dr. John Matthai Centre Thrissur , University of Calicut, 2000

CHAPTER VII SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Women play a vital role in the rural societies and their role in agriculture is still more important. Survival in the developing countries and regions depend on the work women do. Agriculture sector is the backbone of the rural economies and majority of the females depend upon agriculture as labourers. Indian economy is an agrarian economy. The rural agricultural system and female labourers are closely associated with each other mainly through the supply of their labour power through out the production process, except during ploughing and sowing. Even though they work hard, their socio-economic status is very low. Their dependence on labour has aggravated this situation.

The present study is mainly concentrated on female labourers who are engaged in agriculture with special reference to Palakkad district of Kerala. In rural areas of Palakkad district, women play a significant part in agricultural production. The agriculture sector is the backbone of this district. Among the major paddy growing districts of Kerala, Palakkad alone accounts for nearly 25

per cent of the total area under paddy cultivation and this district is known as the "Rice Bowl of Kerala". With in primary sector, female workers predominate as agricultural labourers. About 70.17 per cent of the female workers returned as agricultural labourers. In rural areas, their proportion is at 73.31 per cent. While considering the problems of female agricultural labourers, the phase of economic development and the nature of rural economy, the present study mainly based on agriculture sector and female agricultural labourers.

On the basis of the significance of female labourers in agricultural production, the present study has been taken various aspects relating to female labourers with the hope that this would bring out the true picture of agriculture and its dependent female agricultural labourers. No serious study has so far been undertaken to get to the core of the problem and to examine the status of these women. In order to analyse the role of female agricultural labourers, the present study mainly stressed on five specific objectives. The objectives are: to analyse the pattern of change in the employment of women in the agricultural sector, examine the role, position and wages of female agricultural labourers in different agricultural operations, analyse the socio-economic conditions of female agricultural

labourers, find out the problems and difficulties faced by agricultural labourers at work place and at home and examine the changing role of women agricultural labourers in the context of land reforms in the state.

Based on the objectives and importance, the study consists of seven chapters. The first one is the introductory chapter, which gives the importance of the role of women in agriculture and economic development as labourers, the significance, objectives and scope of the study. In this section is also included the limitations of the study. The present study is restricted in its scope and is mainly confined to 300 rural female agricultural labourers engaged in paddy cultivation in three taluks of Palakkad district.

The second chapter is divided into two major parts, the first one gives an account of review of earlier studies concerned with the analysis of the role and importance of agricultural labourers in economic development and the different aspects which are related to the socio-economic status of these labourers. The second part is mainly dealt with the Data and Methodology used in the present study. Data collected for this study belong to two categories: Primary and secondary. For the purpose of

primary data collection, a field investigation was conducted with the help of structured interview schedule, in six selected village panchayats - Kizhakkencherry and Thenkurissi from Alattur taluk, Nallepully and Muthalamada from Chittur taluk and Elappully and Parali from Palakkad taluk of Palakkad district during 1998-99.

For the purpose of the present study, a stratified sampling procedure is adopted and thus a total of 300 female agricultural labourers have been selected as ultimate stage of sampling for primary investigation. Sample size of each panchayat was decided in proportion to the degree of concentration of female agricultural labourers. The sample labourers from sample size designed for each panchayat were randomly selected.

The collected data have been analysed in a number of closely related operation according to the nature of the response. The Chi-Square test has been used to establish the association between the variables. Where the tests are self-explanatory, the data was presented as such and no statistical test is applied, where the simple statistical methods such as average and percentages are used. In order to identify the poor families among the sample households, a Quality of Life Index was constructed

on the basis of their housing facilities, sanitation facilities, ownership of assets and agricultural land.

The first objective of the study has been analysed and presented in the third chapter. It dealt with the pattern of change in the employment of women in agricultural sector. This has been accomplished with the help of secondary data, which are collected from various official publications and other published and unpublished materials in the form of reports, books, Journals and periodicals devoted to female agricultural labourers.

The role and position of female agricultural labourers and the rate and pattern of wages of these labourers has been discussed in the fourth chapter. These factors are also analysed on the basis of secondary data. Thus in the first and second chapter of the study, an attempt was made to analyse the influential factors especially the level of employment and wages on the lives of female agricultural labourers and their families.

The third, fourth and fifth objectives of the study are analysed mainly using primary data, which is collected from 300 female agricultural labourers. The profile of the sample area is presented in the first section of the fifth

chapter. Findings of the fieldwork with a view to analyse the socio-economic conditions of these labourers are shown in the second part of the fifth chapter.

The fourth and fifth objectives of the study has been analysed and presented in the sixth chapter. The present day problems and difficulties faced by female agricultural labourers at work place and at home, analysed in the first section of the sixth chapter. On the basis of fieldwork, this study also analysed the changing role of female agricultural labourers in the context of land reforms in the state. The present study, with some of its limitations, has modestly attempted to look into the question in the overall context of the agrarian relations. In the last chapter, summary, conclusion and recommendations of the present study has been cited on the light of data collected from different sources.

With respect to the specific objectives, the study came out with the following major findings.

Even though there is occupational diversification in the economy, it is significant to note that rural women continues to concentrate in agriculture especially as agricultural labourers even in Kerala economy

(36.1 per cent). In India, the proportion of female agricultural labourers is 44.2 per cent. In rural areas, their proportion is at 48.83 per cent in India and 41.74 per cent in Kerala, and they are still in unorganised sector. In case of agricultural labourers, Palakkad holds a unique position with 70.17 per cent of its female workers returned as agricultural labourers. In rural and urban areas, their proportion is 73.31 per cent and 45.50 per cent respectively.

Although there is concentration on participation of female workforce as agricultural labourers, this does not indicate there is increasing volume of employment days in agriculture sector. It shows a declining trend and most of them are marginal workers. The seasonal nature of the work is the important characteristic of female agricultural labourers and the declining trend of employment days is an index of their income and standard of living.

There is strong segregation of work in the agricultural sector on the basis of sex. Women are employed in various agricultural operations such as land preparation, transplanting, weeding harvesting, threshing, winnowing and storage of crops. The level of employment of female labourers are mostly related to the extent and

intensity of food crops especially paddy cultivation. Paddy cultivation requires around 90 per cent of hired labour and 75 per cent is provided by female labour.

The operational-wise employment of the labourers are always changing from time to time and region to region. The available days of employment to female labourers is higher, however, the high concentration of female labourers on agricultural activities will decrease the available days of employment to each labourer. Only 18.67 per cent of the respondents get employment a period ranging between 11 to 14 days per month. Out of which, 50 per cent of the respondents is from Alathur taluk. The average available days of employment are higher in Alathur than Chittur and Palakkad taluk. One of the important reasons for the decline in employment days in Palakkad is due to a decline in the area utilised for paddy cultivation. During 1998-99, there is sharp decline in the area under cultivation from 120809 to 107467 hectares in Palakkad district of Kerala. In technological advanced society, agricultural labourers have no chance to enter into other fields of work. As a whole, 4.33 per cent of the respondents have got occupational wise training or experiences. Most of respondents (95.67 per cent) have no such training and they remained as unskilled workers.

There are no barriers to enter into agricultural employment. However, women from economically and socially backward groups generally worked as agricultural labourers. As many as 76 per cent of the respondents are drawn from socially backward group, 21 per cent from Hindu Ezhava and participation of Muslim (2 per cent) and Christian (1 per cent) women in agriculture is insignificant. The predominance of economically and socially backward rural women in agriculture not only reflects their low standard of living, low status and landlessness but also has extremely limited options. It is also significant to note that there is a declining trend among the young generation into workforce as agricultural labourers whether they are socially or economically poor. 83 per cent of the respondent stated that the young generation is not interested in following the footprints of their parents to continue as agricultural labourers.

Among the states of India, Kerala has the highest agricultural wages. In 1997-98, the wages for male workers in Kerala is Rs.102.72 and Rs.69.35 for females. At the same time, in all India level (1997-98) wages for male workers is Rs.56.00 and Rs.43.50 is for females. However, there is regional disparities in the existing wages, Palakkad is one of the low wage districts in Kerala especially to female

labourers. And among the sample areas of Palakkad, agricultural wages for female labour is highest in Chittur taluk (Rs.40) than Alathur (Rs.35) and Palakkad taluk (Rs.35). The average female wage per hour in Chittur taluk is Rs.5.00 and Rs.4.37 in Alathur and Palakkad taluk.

In Palakkad district there is still the prevalence of payment in kind for agricultural work. During harvesting and threshing, both males and females get 1/7 part of the agricultural produce. In all activities, except harvesting and threshing, they get wages in cash. During harvesting and threshing, the wages paid to the labourers is on the basis of product and to other activities on the basis of time. A day's labour involves eight hours of work for women. The hours of work and work schedule are the same in all the sample areas of Palakkad district.

It also shows that activities, which are male dominated, are paid more such as ploughing (Rs.80), sowing (Rs.60) and even in operations in which both are employed. In Chittur it is Rs.55 for males and Rs.40 for females. In other sample taluks, the wage for male worker is Rs.50 and Rs.35 for females. Thus the economic rating of an operation is not done by the quality of work but by whether it is done by male or female.

Though a large number of organisations including registered trade unions and voluntary organisations have been making various efforts to organize the workers in Kerala, by and large, female labourers in sample areas are not represented by major trade unions and in other organizations. Only 17 per cent of the respondents have membership and participation in trade union activities, out of which, 54.9 per cent is from Chittur taluk. Only 21.33 per cent of the respondents have participation in Mahila Samaj and 12 per cent of them are actively involved themselves in public meetings. The major reason for their absent from meeting is due to their pre-occupation with domestic or agricultural chores.

On the basis of analysis, it is really observed that the socio-economic conditions of female agricultural labourers remain poor even today. More than 86 per cent of the respondents' monthly income falls below Rs.600. Only 14 per cent of the respondents have income more than Rs.601 and above. Out of which, 66.67 per cent is from Alathur, because the wage rate is not the only determinant of income, but is also depends upon the available days of employment per labourer. Lack of alternative employment and seasonal nature of work in agriculture compelled them to spend their whole income especially on necessary food

items, which indicates low level of saving, low consumption and low nutritional standard. Majority of income (63 per cent to 70 per cent) is used for food and out of which 60 per cent is spend on rice alone. The remaining meagre income is divided on other items, which are necessary for their living.

The low level of income of the respondents shows the low level of saving. Only 13.33 per cent of the respondents have saving, out of which 47 per cent is have saving less then Rs.500, however, none of them have regular saving. Majority of them (75 per cent) who have saving keep this small amount with them secretly. About (19.33 per cent) of the respondents' family tried to adjust their income to expenditure. They are free from debt.67.34 per cent of the respondents' households are in debt; in most cases (89 per cent) loans are unproductive in nature. Only 11.88 per cent of them approached banks to raise loans. Most of them (57.92 per cent) are borrowed from moneylenders and land owners. About 43.56 per cent of the labourers owe amounts ranging from Rs.3001 to 5000.

One of the important determinants of status in the society is on the basis of h^uosing and related facilities. The housing conditions and related facilities of agricultural

labourers are very pathetic. A majority of 97.67 per cent of the households lives their own houses, only 1.33 per cent of families live in rented houses and one per cent in pooramboku lands. Out of which, 14 per cent of the labourers live in thatched houses. Majority of the labourers live in small and single room tiled houses. The housing conditions of the respondents also cause much inconvenience to them. The hut-like houses have no proper ventilation and adequate accommodation. More than half of the respondents (52.67 per cent) have latrines, and only 14.67 per cent have separate bathroom. At the same time, 53.33 per cent of the households enjoyed the facility of electricity. However, 88 per cent of the houses have no access to clean drinking water facility with in the house.

As far as women labourers in agriculture are concerned, there is no scope for investment. They are economically poor without land or land with very small in size. Due to lack of productive assets, they exclusively earn income from their physical labour. The bulk of the assets of these poor households consist only of their hut-like houses, some household goods and some livestock. Only 15 per cent of the respondents' households have assets worth of Rs.1001 and above Rs.2000, in which the value of land

and houses are excluded. About 56 per cent of the households concentrated in the category of Rs.501 - 1000.

The socio-economic status of agricultural labour household is closely related to the ownership of land holdings. The ownership of land provides dignity, status and power in the society. The majority of women agricultural labourers, along with their men folk in most cases, are property less with no productive assets of their own to credit except their labour power. Lack of land, that makes them labour on others' land and suffer, appears to be the root cause of all their problems. Most of them (68.87 per cent) own a small plot of land, which is less than 10 cents each. It has to be noticed that no labour households own paddy fields. As a whole, about 38 per cent of the households do not have anything more than their house site area.

In general, Palakkad district follows a patrilineal system in which the productive assets are given in the name of their men folk. The pattern of ownership of land shows only 15.36 per cent of the women respondents have the right of ownership. There is a close association between the land holdings and ownership in the sample areas of Palakkad, which is more allotted to men.

The economic condition of the female agricultural labourers further deteriorated with their husbands' addiction to alcohol, smoking and gambling. It created uneasiness and additional burden on the shoulders of female labourers. 69 per cent of the respondents reported that their husbands are addicted to these habits specially to alcohol drinking. Though their husbands drink and gamble away their wages, in most cases, the decision making in the family rests in the hands of the men folk only. Female labourers have even lost control over their own earnings. Women are unequal in the patriarchal society of the world, more so with women in all regions like Palakkad. The male members have control over their lives, property, assets, power and decision making. In many cases, female are the custodian of their wages till they arrives home only. Her income later becomes part of total income of their family. The socio-economic conditions under which these labourers live have continued to be traditional and exploitative in nature.

It is a real fact that there is a close relation between the level of family welfare and the income of the female respondents. Most of their income is used for absolute necessities and they consider it as essential. They spent less income for their personal needs than men folk.

In this context, most of the respondents (78 per cent) opined that women should have an income of their own. Income in women's hands could benefit not only to women but the whole family.

In a traditional bound social system, women are far beyond from taking an equal share along with their men in all the activities despite their earning. Basically the family structure in Palakkad continues to be traditional and male dominated. This continues to be unaffected from times immemorial leaving a great impact on the lives of women in general and of the female agricultural labourers in particular. Most of the respondents revealed the fact that decisions on a large number of cases are taken by their men folk and they simply obeyed their decisions. Only 17.33 per cent of the female agricultural labourers take decisions in all the important issues affecting the family. Though the women work and earn like men, they do not enjoy the decision making authority like men. However, 54.33 per cent the respondents reported that they have freedom to express their ideas and opinions.

The higher participation of women in economic activity was found to have a positive impact on the status and power of women within the household as reflected in

their role in decision making. It is however, found that the correspondence between work participation of female labourers in agriculture and their status was not perfect and male domination continued to exist due to the prevalent patriarchy in Palakkad, which shaped the attitudes of both men and women. Most of the respondents revealed that there are gender differences as revealed in income spending pattern as well as in the use of productive resources. There is a fact that even employment is not a sufficient condition for the enhanced status of females, even in households. In spite of their crucial role, women continue to be marginalized with inadequate involvement in decision making and control over resources.

Despite, all the developments one may see that women are still less endowed than men with health care, education and employment. The availability of services, as to who gets what is closely tied with gender. The gender inequality is built in our customs, traditions, beliefs and practices. 43 per cent of the respondents reported that there is differential treatment accorded to boys and girls in socialization process in the consumption of food, in the extent of utilization of health services and continuance in school. This is especially true in the lower income groups.

Among the states of India, Kerala has achieved a high per cent of literary rates (89.81 per cent), however, there is regional inequality in literacy rates and Palakkad is one of the backward districts in literacy level especially in the case of females. It clearly stated that about 32 per cent of the respondents are deprived of the advantages of education and they remained as illiterate. 47.33 per cent of the respondents have education up to primary, 19 per cent is up to middle school and 1.67 per cent in high school. None of them have qualification of S.S.L.C and above.

It is important to note that the level of education among the female agricultural labourers is very low, out of which most of them are from the socially backward groups at national, state and local levels. There is a close association between the caste and education of the female agricultural labourers. The educational level of the respondents is low and majority of them (76 per cent) hail from socially backward groups. Out of 32 per cent of illiterate respondents, 89.58 per cent from socially backward groups and 10.42 per cent is from Hindu Ezhava.

Most of the respondents (50 per cent) opined that, they did not get proper education due to economic compulsion and economic problems, 30 per cent did not feel

the importance and the necessity of education for their occupation. About 20 per cent of them are compelled to stay at home to look after the younger ones and to do household work. However, there is an increasing level of education among their children and they are forced to give education to the younger generation.

Women agricultural labourers are burdened with double responsibility. The female agricultural labourers have to shoulder the family responsibilities besides attending to their work outside the home. The work they do in the agricultural field and at home makes them tense and ultimately affects their health to a considerable extent. In spite of all this, some respondents get no human treatment from their husbands and other family members. 50 per cent of the respondents reported that they have some problems to reach their working places at the right time because of the burden of household work and the long distance between the houses and working place. During the season of hard work, they find their labour very tedious. Generally in poor families, women have to participate in wage labour regardless of childcare and domestic work.

In a rural society like Palakkad, where land is the most important sources of living for a large sections of

the people, and the rights on land confer socio-economic status and dignity. Land reform is of prime importance for agriculture is the largest economic sector in Palakkad district of Kerala. The rural population is the poorest, most exploited and almost completely unorganised segment of rural economy. Distribution of land to the poor is an important component of the government policy for their upliftment.

There is no substantial change in the role of female agricultural labourers due to the implementation of land reforms in Palakkad district of Kerala. There is a big increase in the number of female agricultural labourers during the period of study. Their proportion today is at 73.31 per cent in rural areas. Similarly, though the share of the labourers in the primary sector declined only marginally in 1981 and 1991, 70.17 per cent of the female labourers are still in agriculture in 1991 and only 7.76 per cent of the women are returned as cultivators. In this respect, the status of females does not change from wage labour to self-producer and thus the importance of land reforms is insignificant in Palakkad district of Kerala.

Distribution of surplus land through land reforms have only raised the land status of the land less

labour households, not in size but in ownership which is less than 10 cents each. Accordingly, 55.13 per cent of the land holdings among the sample households were required by way of land reforms especially through the distribution of surplus land. In most cases, the rights of ownership confer to their men only. Only few females (13.31 per cent) have the right of ownership through land reforms on their land holdings. These small bits of land cannot be used for cultivation and productive purposes. So land reform is not an effective measure on production and employment generation especially to the poor female labourers. Again the partition of these small bits of land among the labour households, create a negative impact that is sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings.

The study reveals that although women have participated in economic activities and domestic work, they have limited control over their earned income and economic resources. The employment in the agricultural field has not changed the status of the women, who continue to suffer and remain fixed in the traditional framework of a subservient wife or a dependent mother in the male dominated society. The factors like the seasonal nature of employment in agriculture, preference of men over women, lack of skills and education, landlessness and

discriminatory wages contributed considerably to the depressive work situation of female agricultural labourers.

Recommendations

Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. Women who are poor in money terms need not necessarily be poor in terms of capacity for initiating change. Three important areas concerning women viz., health, education and their economic potential to be taken care of in order to harness more fully the rich resources of women power for the over all development of the rural society. The present study recognises the following recommendations.

In rural areas, especially in agriculture, women's backbreaking work is conveniently treated as deserving less than the rewards paid to the males even for identical operations. There is a need for revising the existing wage rate. Through a careful operation and implementation and frequent check on the working of Equal Remuneration system to men and women workers and a timely

modification of minimum wages can reduce the sufferings of women due to various discrimination specific to their sex.

In developing areas, agricultural productivity cannot be substantially increased, nor can rural poverty be alleviated, unless women's access to key productive resources and services is substantially improved. In order to provide equal access to financial credit, to reduce the burden of women and to encourage the productive channels, Women Co-operative Finance Societies can be formulated and provide loans at minimum rate of interest and try to minimize the formalities to get funds. Through the working of these co-operatives, employment opportunities can be created and can shift the surplus labour to other related activities like dairy, horticulture and livestock.

There is need for educating employers and employees about the provisions and procedures of different legislations and more women's organisations and human rights watch groups should be involved in educating women about their rights and duties.

Though most women in India and developing regions are backward, the socially backward groups are more backward among the backwards and therefore deserve

special attention not only to raise their status in their own communities but also to bring them socially at par with other women in all spheres of life. For this it is essential to provide compulsory education, skills and occupational - wise training and increase their participation in Mahila Samaj and other voluntary organizations. These kinds of services will create chance for self-employment among these economically backward groups.

In order to reduce the burden of women labourers in agriculture, simple machines could be introduced and provide training to the labourers itself to operate these machines must be given.

Land reform measures have also not taken into cognizance interests of women as co-owners or cultivators of land. Distribution of land through land reforms can increase the status, bargaining power and access to credit facilities by conferring the right of ownership in the name of females.

Conversion of agricultural land into other purposes except agricultural production should be strictly prohibited and provide irrigation facilities especially during the third crop to generate employment opportunities.

Develop services to reduce women's child care and domestic work load, including incentives to employers to provide child care facilities for working women and treat women labourers as a person and productive contributors to the economy.

In order to overcome the growing labour scarcity problem in agriculture and encourage the young generation into this sector, government must provide them the privileges and benefits of organised sectors of the economy.

Women in agriculture have vast potential, intelligence and ability, which is tapped properly, may enable them to join the main stream of agricultural development. The main problem and source of exploitation of these women are rooted in their ignorance, helplessness, landlessness, lack of education, lack of organization and inequality in status. It is therefore; necessary to equip these women with required information, knowledge and skills to enable them to do their work efficiently and become equal partners in agricultural production.

APPENDIX 1

Quality of Life Index – Variables and Score

Sl.No	Variable		Score
1.	Housing Facilities		
	a. Separate room for cooking	Yes	5
		No	0
	b. Number of living rooms (More than 2)	Yes	5
No		0	
2.	Land for cultivation	Yes	10
		No	0
3.	Value of Assets (except land and house) more than Rs. 2000/-	Yes	10
		No	0
4.	Drinking Water Facilities with in the house	Yes	10
		No	0
5.	Electrification	Yes	10
		No	0
6.	Sanitation facilitates		
	a. Latrine	Yes	5
		No	0
	b. Bathroom	Yes	5
		No	0
	Total Score		60

APPENDIX II QUESTIONNAIRE

Survey on Socio-Economic Conditions of Female Agricultural Labourers in Palakkad District of Kerala (For research purpose)

I Identification Particulars

1. Name and address :
2. Taluk :
3. Block : 4. Panchayat :

II Personal Particulars

1. Age :
2. Caste: Hindu Ezhava/Scheduled Caste/ Christian/
Muslim
3. Educational Standard: Illiterate/ Primary/ Middle
School/ High School/ S.S.L.C and above
4. Reasons for dropping out of studies:
 - a) Education is not necessary for your
occupation
 - b) Did not feel the importance of education at
that time.
 - c) Due to economic Problems
 - d) To look after younger ones and to do house
hold work.
5. Marital Status: Single/ Married/ Divorced/ Widowed
6. If Married: a) Age at the time of Marriage:
 - b) Native Place:

III Particulars on family and living conditions

1. Details regarding the members of your family:

Sl. No	Name	Sex	Age	Relation ship	Educational Qualification	Occup-ation	Inco-me	Marital Status

2. Type of family in which you are living:

Nuclear/ Nuclear extended/ Joint family

3. Nature of house: Own/for hire/ on leased land/ on puramboke land

4. Structure of house: Thantched/Tiled/Concrete

5. Number of living rooms: 1/2/3/4 and above

6. Whether having separate kitchen: Yes/No

7. Does it have Electricity: Yes/No

8. Source of drinking water: Own well/ Pancha- yat tap/ neighbour's well/ Panchayath well.

9. Toilet facilities: a) Bathroom: Yes/No

b) Latrine: Yes/No

10. Staple food: Rice/Wheat/ any other

11. Quantity of food you take on an average every day: one meal/two/ three/ others

12. Do you take any extra food other than your normal food: Yes/No.

If yes specify

The use of meat: Nil/very rarely/ frequently

The use of milk: Nil/very rarely/ frequently

The use of egg: Nil/very rarely/ frequently

13. What do you do with your children under the age of 4, when you go to work? : Do you take your child with you/ leave them at home with elder children or relatives/ leave them at home/ask neighbours to keep a watch

14 Number of children attending school

Sl. No	Sex		Total Number of Children (6-14 years)	No. of Children attending school	Reason for not attending
	M	F			

15. Preferential treatment for boys over girls serving food/education / other privileges at home
16. Time devoted to daily household work:
17. Duration of daily leisure time available to you:
18. How do you relax: Chat with friends in the colony/ do sewing or knitting/ go to the cinema/ visit temples/ watch television/ N.A.
19. Who helps you with house work the most: husband/ children/Mother-in law/ other relatives/ None
20. Who make purchases for the households:

IV Wages and Employment Particulars

1. Nature of employment: Permanent/Casual
2. How many days in a month on average do you get work:
3. Approximate number of hours spent at work place:
4. Do you have any facility/difficulty at your work place:
5. What is periodicity of payment: Daily/Weekly/ Monthly Basis
6. Do you have permanent income: Yes/No
7. What are the problems when you don't have permanent income: loan problem/ food shortage/Not able to Plan/ N.A

8. What is your daily wage:

On what basis	:	Time/Productivity
Wage in	:	Cash/Kind
9. Total monthly income:
10. Income from agricultural wage:
11. Income on other sources:
12. Do you get any other benefits from employer:
13. Details of any discrimination against women workers in your society:
14. Are you member of any trade Union: Yes/No
15. Is there any chance of losing employment opportunities because of the introduction of modern machines and practices in agricultural fields:
16. Does it provide easiness to work: Yes/No
17. Are there opportunities for development in your occupation: Yes/No
18. Distance from house to work place: $\frac{1}{4}$ km/ $\frac{1}{2}$ km/ $\frac{3}{4}$ km and above km
19. Do your children prefer to follow your foot prints in agriculture as labourers: Yes/No

V Family Budget

1. What is your monthly expenditure:
2. On which item do you spend the major portion of your income

Food	:	
Clothing	:	
Fuel and light	:	
Education and services	:	
Medical treatment	:	
Festivals and ceremonies	:	
3. Does your husband/father smoke/drinking/gamble

VI Saving Aspect

1. Do you have any saving : Yes/No
2. If yes:
 - a. How much :
 - b. Means to preserve saving : Chitty/Kuries/ Bank deposit/keep in hand/ N.A

VII Debt liabilities

1. If your family in debt : Yes/No
2. Extent of indebtedness:
3. From whom was the money borrowed : Local money lender/ Banks/ Co-operative Societies/ land owners/ others.
4. Specify reasons for indebtedness: Household Expenditure/ Marriage/ Education/ construction and Maintenance of Houses/ Productive Purposes.

VII Asset Particulars

1. Land : Yes/No
 - Area of land :
 - Ownership of land :
2. Nature of Acquisition of land:
 - Ownership at the time of acquisition:
 - Area of land :
3. Live stocks : Yes/No
4. Consumer Durable Goods: Table/ Chair/ Cot/ Radio/ Steel Utensils/ Aluminium Vessels/ Watch/ Cycle/ Gold Ornaments/ Television.
5. Value of Assets (Excluding House and land) : Rs. 500- Rs.1000/ Rs.1001-Rs. 1500/ Rs. 1501 – Rs. 2000/ Rs. 2001-2500.

IX Particulars of social involvement and social status

1. Educational facilities in your society: School/
anganvadi/ Nursery
2. Means to entertainment : Theatre/ Community hall/
Public T.V./ Radio/ Tape Recorder
3. Do you have membership in youth club/Mahila Samaj
: Yes/No
4. Have you participated in any public meeting or
demonstration : Yes/No/very rarely
5. Did you get any kind of occupational training or
experience : Yes/No
6. Do you have membership in religious and cultural
organization : Yes/No
7. Did you vote in the last election: Yes/No
8. Under whose guidance did you vote: Self/ Suggested
by Husband/ Union Leaders/ co-workers
9. Your visiting places: Market/ Houses of relatives/
religious places.
10. How are marriage usually contracted: Arranged/free
choice.
11. Is there any chance for inter caste marriage:
yes/No/very rarely
12. What media reaches you? Talk to people/ Radio/
T.V./ News paper/ Nothing
13. What is your opinion about the dowry system?
Necessary/ it should be abolished/ if it is
given it will be accepted.
14. What is the attitude of society towards the baby girls:
Accepted/ not accepted/N.A
15. Do you think that the condition of women needs to be
improved: Yes/ No

16. What are the difficulties facing women in your society: poverty/ unemployment/ lack of education and skill/ problem of health/ no freedom/ no status in the society/ ill treatment of husbands/ growing daughters of marriageable age.
17. What are the problems in your occupation: Non-availability of employment/ Restrictions on the freedom of movement of women outside the family/ Double burden of work at home and outside.
18. Are you satisfied with your job: Yes/No
19. What do you spend on: Saree/ Medicine/ Tea or coffee/ Cosmetic articles/ entertainments/ tobacco chewing
20. Do you have the freedom to express your views about personal desires and ambitions: Yes/No
21. Do you keep your salary yourself or hand it over to husband/Mother-in-law/father-in-law/others
22. In you family who spends the family income.
23. In your family who makes the final decision on the following:

	Husband	Self	Jointly	Others
1.Family budgeting				
2.Purchase of goods				
3.Future decisions				
4.Education of children				
5.Career of children				

24. Your views of separate income for women: Necessary/
Absolutely necessary/ good to have but there
is no way/husbands' earnings is enough/ No
response.

25. Purpose of having separate income for women: Day to
day needs/ to have one's own money to
spend/specific purpose/ for all kinds of
domestic needs/no response.

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